

**EXPLORING THE BODY IMAGE AND CAMARADERIE EXPERIENCES OF  
BREAST CANCER SURVIVORS IN ENDURANCE SPORTING EVENTS**

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## Abstract

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in North America (American Cancer Society [ACS], 2012; Canadian Cancer Society [CCS], 2012). Women diagnosed with breast cancer undergo a traumatic experience that disrupts their quality of life (Holmberg, Scott, Alexy, & Fife, 2001). In the psychological domain of quality of life, body image is disrupted due to the changes associated with breast cancer surgeries and treatments (Hormes et al., 2008). This is important because breast cancer survivors' quality of life is an essential part of their survivorship (Kaiser, 2008). Evidence has suggested that physical activity shows improvements in body image, survival rates, and decreased risk of mortality (Schmitz, 2011). Furthermore, a unique form of physical activity associated with breast cancer that has risen among this population is endurance sporting events, such as dragon boating and running (Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation [CBCF], 2012; Parry, 2008).

Endurance sporting events are common among breast cancer organizations to raise funds and spread breast cancer awareness (Kaiser, 2008). However, they also provide breast cancer survivors with a fun and healthy sporting environment to explore their body image as well as shared experiences with other breast cancer survivors. Researchers have shown endurance sporting events to be a comfortable environment for breast cancer survivors to allow their experiences to unfold (McDonough, Sabiston, & Crocker, 2008; Sabiston, McDonough, & Crocker, 2007). Due to the uniqueness of each woman's breast cancer experience, it is important to explore their body image experiences to understand their personal stories and provide meaning to enhance their quality of life as breast cancer survivors. The general purpose of this dissertation is to explore the body image and camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in endurance sporting events. Furthermore, the guiding research question of this dissertation is: What are the body image and camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors participating in endurance sporting events? Narrative research methodology will be used to provide insight into this research question across two studies.

To address the gap in the literature, Study 1 of my dissertation provided narratives of three breast cancer survivors' body image experiences as they trained for and participated in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. Two individual semi-structured interviews, prolonged engagement, and blogging were used as sources of data collection over a time period of 10 weeks. Data analyses led to the emergence of three themes: *"new normal"*, *goal setting*, and *camaraderie*.

Camaraderie, representing the shared breast cancer survivors' experiences that allowed the women to focus on their physical capabilities, accept their bodies, and create an overall body image experience, was a particularly salient theme to the women throughout their training. Hence, the purpose of Study 2 was to explore the camaraderie narrative experiences of breast cancer survivors in a season of dragon boating. Focus group interviews and creative practices were conducted with a core group of 11 breast cancer survivors over a six month time period. The women defined camaraderie as fellowship, teamwork, and support shared between women with breast cancer experiences. Subsequent data analyses resulted in five themes: *attention please, paddles up, take it away, hold the boat, and reach*. Overall, camaraderie was shown to be crucial to the survivorship of the women, as social experiences are an important component to life after breast cancer. The findings were written as a collective (e.g., camaraderie) narrative.

Taken together, these two studies demonstrated that body image and camaraderie are important components to breast cancer survivors' participation in endurance sporting events. More specifically, both studies informed the literature by describing the relationship between the camaraderie and body image experiences for the women involved in both the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and a season of dragon boating. Camaraderie was the motive that created an overall positive body image experience for the women. Furthermore, endurance sporting events associated with breast cancer formed natural, comfortable, and safe environments for the women to express their experiences. In addition, camaraderie seemed to be a key process through which the women were able to accept their bodies and the body-related changes that resulted from cancer. In both studies, breast cancer survivors' participation in endurance sports included camaraderie experiences that led to fulfilling the physical, emotional, and social needs as a mode for the women to move beyond their breast cancer experiences.

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*“I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength” Philippians 4:13*

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## **Dedication**

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## **Chapter I**

### **1.1 Review of Literature**

Breast cancer is one of the most common cancers among North American women (American Cancer Society [ACS], 2012; Canadian Cancer Society [CCS], 2012). Statistically, 1 in 9 women are diagnosed in their lifetime with breast cancer (ACS, 2012; CCS, 2012). There are 2.5 million breast cancer survivors in the United States and approximately 153,000 breast cancer survivors in Canada (ACS, 2012; CCS, 2012). The National Cancer Institute in the United States defined breast cancer survivorship as life in health after a cancer diagnosis and once treatment is over (cancer.gov, 2013). This definition is applied to all cancers, not just breast cancer. Survivorship has been identified as a key topic of concern by two national panels: the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the U.S. and The Canadian Partnership Against Cancer (CPAC) in Canada (Ristovski-Slijepcevic, 2008). The term “survivor” is frequently associated with breast cancer since it has one of the largest populations of cancer survivors (Kaiser, 2008; King, 2006). However, the definition of survivorship may vary depending on each woman’s experience and interpretation (Kaiser, 2008). For example, Kaiser found that some breast cancer survivors rejected the idealism of survivorship, while other women considered themselves a “survivor” and embraced survivorship.

Parry (2008) stated that the idea of embracing breast cancer survivorship emerged during the 1980s and 1990s, when American feminists petitioned for constitutional change in financial support for breast cancer medicine. American feminists took the movement a step further and created the idea of companies campaigning their products for a medical cure for breast cancer (King, 2006). As a result, numerous non-profit organizations, foundations, and fund-raising events for breast cancer have developed over the last 30 years, often forming alliances with corporate sponsors such as New Balance, Ford Motor Company, Avon, and Yoplait (Braun, 2000; King, 2006; Klawiter, 1999).

Fundraising events for breast cancer survivors have emerged as opportunities that allow individuals to embrace their identity and celebrate being a survivor (Kaiser, 2008). For example, during the annual Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure event, survivors

adorn themselves with pink shirts, hats, socks, footwear, and jewelry, and are honored in a survivor ceremony and parade (Kaiser, 2008; King, 2006). As previously mentioned, each woman's definition and meaning of survivorship depends on her personal breast cancer experiences and interpretations.

Since the breast cancer movement in the 1980's and 1990's (Parry, 2008), the survival rates of women with breast cancer have increased due to the early detection and improvements in treatment (Schmitz, 2011). Even though survival rates are increasing, quality of life has become a key concern for enhancing cancer survivorship (Brunet et al., 2011). Bloom and colleagues (2004) and Ferrell and Dow (1997) have both stated that quality of life consists of four domains: physical, psychological, social, and spirituality. First, the physical domain includes the control and relief from symptoms that include function and independence. Second, the psychological domain consists of trying to maintain a sense of control, characterized by distress, fear, altered life priorities, unknown positive changes, and body image. Third, the social domain includes the individual's need for social support and relationships, as well as the impact of cancer on others. Fourth, spirituality consists of maintaining hope and finding meaning from the cancer experience (Ferrell & Dow, 1997).

Enhancing the quality of life in breast cancer survivors has been an important area of focus for researchers given the distress that is placed on survivors (Segrin & Badger, 2014; Brunet et al., 2011). The National Cancer Institute (2014) has stated that distress is a key issue for survivors, defined as "an unpleasant experience of an emotional, psychological, social, or spiritual nature that interferes with the ability to cope with cancer treatment" (p.1). Understanding some of the concerns that may cause distress for breast cancer survivors at the onset of diagnosis include, but are not limited to, body-related changes in their breasts (e.g., deformities, side effects, loss of tissue), menopause, sleep, decreased range of motion, lymphedema, weight gain, and decreased muscle mass (Brunet et al., 2011; Ferrell & Dow, 1997; Firth, Harcourt, & Fussell, 2007). Researchers have stated that breast cancer diagnosis and treatment may create negative body image experiences for women that may last for years (Brunet et al., 2011; Falk, Dahl, Reinersten, Nesvold, Fossa, & Dahl, 2010). Since body image has been documented to be such an important aspect to the quality of life for breast cancer survivors (Bloom,

Stewart, Chang, & Banks, 2004), it is crucial that researchers continue to further understand survivors' body image experiences, as well as how a positive body image can lead to improvements in their quality of life.

### **1.2.1 Body Image Experiences of Breast Cancer Survivors**

While there are many definitions of body image that include thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and attitudes, there lacks a clear definition of body image (Blood, 2005; Figueiredo, Cullen, Hwang, Rowland, & Mandelblatt, 2004). Cash and Pruzinsky (2004) defined body image as body-related thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and attitudes including, but not limited to, one's physical appearance. Blood (2005) suggested that women's body image is often seen as a social construction because of different influences in their lives and their own role in the construction of body image. Women predominately are more concerned than men about their appearance, weight, and body (Cash & Smolak, 2011). Furthermore, the diagnosis of breast cancer is a traumatic experience that disrupts a woman's body image (Hormes et al., 2008).

Breast cancer surgery and treatment can cause body image concerns after the diagnosis of breast cancer (McDonough et al., 2008). Psychologically, women's body image experiences are shaped by significant changes to the body such as weight gain, hair loss, mastectomy, reconstruction, and lumpectomy (McDonough et al., 2008). Survivorship is important to women with breast cancer because of the role it plays in their body image experiences. Helms, O'Hea, and Croso (2008) described the impact of breast cancer on a woman's body image before and after cancer by stating that "once a woman may no longer be worried about mortality, at her core, she is often the same woman with the same appearance concerns she had pre-cancer, but she does not have the same body she had pre-cancer" (p. 323). Even though breast cancer surgeries and treatments may change a woman's body image, she may still have similar body image concerns as to had she had before, such as physical appearance and physical self-perceptions regardless of the cancer diagnosis (Pelusi, 1997). However, breast cancer surgeries and treatments still remain a significant source of body image concern for women with breast cancer.

It is important to note that research on types of breast cancer-related surgeries and body image is not clear in stating which surgery options specifically result in a more positive body image; therefore, there is confusion and mixed results. However, according to the breast cancer literature, women are more likely to experience a positive body image when they choose breast conservation or reconstruction surgery versus other surgeries (Figueiredo, Cullen, Hwang, Rowland, & Mandelblatt, 2004; Filiberti, Callegari, Tamburinin, Zanini, & Grisotti, 1994; Kraus, 1999; Mock, 1993). Early research examined women's responses to their body image following the type of surgery they underwent (e.g., mastectomy, reconstruction, and conservation). Results showed that women who chose conservation surgery demonstrated a more positive body image, while women who had mastectomy and reconstruction surgeries reported a more negative body image (Aaronson, Bartelink, van Dongen, & van Dam, 1988; Kemeny, Wellisch, & Schain, 1988; Mock, 1993). Furthermore, Figueiredo et al. (1994) examined the effect of surgery and treatment on body image in breast cancer survivors. They concluded that women who chose breast-conservation surgery had increased positive body image approximately two years after surgery, compared to women with mastectomies.

In sum, studies on breast cancer surgeries and psychological outcomes, including body image, are limited in research design as well as in explanations for their findings. White (2002) suggested that body image among women with breast cancer may result from a variety of factors related to their cancer experience and created a heuristic cognitive behavioural model to guide the assessment, conceptualization, and treatment of body image disturbance specifically for cancer patients (White, 2000).

White's (2000) model consists of a self-schema (i.e., one's beliefs about the self) and a body image-schema (i.e., one's belief about her appearance) which, when activated, will spread to others and influence how appearance-based changes from the cancer experience are processed. The body image schema plays the most important role in determining a cancer patient's personal investment in appearance-related changes and a self-discrepancy that may exist between the actual self and ideal self. The schema and personal investment both determine the types of cross-situational appearance assumptions that are made, thus shaping the following thoughts and images applicable to that specific situation. Overall, cancer patients with a perceived or actual appearance change

accompanied by a threat to their ideal self will experience negative appearance-related assumptions, thoughts, images, behaviours, and emotions when the ideal self is related to an affected body part(s) in which they have significant investment. Furthermore, researchers have shown that physical activity can alleviate some of the effects of cancer and improve the quality of life of breast cancer survivors (McDonough et al., 2008; Sabiston et al., 2007).

### **1.2.2 Breast Cancer and Physical Activity**

The American College of Sports Medicine and the American Cancer Society has created guidelines for cancer survivors, which recommends a moderate level of aerobic physical activity for 150-250 minutes a week (ACS, 2012; ACSM, 2012). Over the past several years, research on breast cancer survivors and physical activity has nearly doubled. This literature has included many physical activity interventions as well as meta-analyses critiquing the interventions (Brunet, Sabiston, & Meterissan, 2011; Schmitz, 2011).

Taken together, the literature shows that there are many demonstrated physical and psychological benefits of physical activity to health and fitness for breast cancer survivors (Brunet et al., 2011; Schmitz, 2011). Physiological benefits include increased aerobic capacity and muscular strength, as well as decreases in lymphedema, body weight, body fat, and fatigue. Furthermore, psychological benefits include decreases in depression and anxiety, as well as increases in self-esteem, body image, and quality of life (Brunet et al., 2011; Schmitz, 2011; McDonough et al., 2008). A form of physical activity often associated with breast cancer is endurance sport (Parry, 2007).

There are many endurance sporting events with a focus on breast cancer survivorship, typically including running, rowing, and dragon boating (Parry, 2007; Susan G. Komen, 2012). The Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation CIBC Run for the Cure, a 5k race that was established in 1992, is a specific example of an event used to fundraise and spread breast cancer awareness (CBCF, 2012). The CIBC Run for the Cure 5k is notable because it is the largest fundraiser dedicated to breast cancer awareness in Canada (Yan, 2009). In the United States, the Susan G. Komen Foundation offers Race for the Cure, Marathon for the Cure, 3-Day Walk, and Row for the Cure (Susan G.



Komen, 2012). As with running events, dragon boating has become another of the most popular endurance sporting events for breast cancer survivors (Parry, 2007).

Dragon boat racing originated in China over 2,000 years ago as a symbol of guardians against evil spirits (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Parry, 2007). The sport of dragon boat racing requires strenuous, repetitive upper-body activity that allows for the participation of 18-22 people per boat, including one steersperson and one drummer (Parry, 2008). The boats are shaped to represent a dragon, and each paddler aims to stroke the water horizontally with a fast backward motion (Harris & Niesen-Vertommen, 2000; Unruh & Elvin, 2004). Breast cancer survivors of all ages are able to participate in dragon boat racing, as long as they are at least six months post-treatment (Parry, 2008). Dr. Donald McKenzie, a sports medicine doctor in British Columbia, conducted “Abreast in a Boat”, which was the first study on dragon boating and breast cancer survivors (McKenzie, 1998). The aim of his study was primarily to demonstrate that upper-body exercise is beneficial in recovery from lymphedema and breast cancer.

McKenzie’s (1998) study also showed that breast cancer survivors did not have an increased risk for lymphedema during physical activity, as well as that dragon boating actually improved their lymphedema symptoms and provided other physical and mental benefits. Parry (2007) stated that the breast cancer survivors in McKenzie’s study were made known throughout breast cancer communities across the world because of their positive dragon boating experiences. Since it was first studied, dragon boating has spread across Canada, the United States, and internationally (Mitchell, Yakiwchuk, Griffin, Gray, & Fitch, 2007; Parry, 2007). In addition, since McKenzie’s study, research on dragon boating and breast cancer survivorship has also increased. Many recent dragon boat studies have focused on the physical and psychological benefits of dragon boating for breast cancer survivors. Specifically, there has been a focus on adherence, stress, well-being, spirituality, and other psychosocial aspects of physical activity (Courneya, Blanchard, & Laing, 2001; Hadd, Sabiston, McDonough, & Crocker, 2010; Parry, 2007; Parry 2008). However, more research on physical activity and breast cancer survivors in general is needed, especially qualitative studies exploring the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors participating in those physical activities. Exploring the breast cancer survivors’ body image experiences in physical activity provides answers to ‘what’,

‘why’, and ‘how’ physical activity shapes and provides meaning to the women’s body image experiences and participation in physical activity (Brunet et al., 2013).

### **1.2.3 Breast Cancer, Body Image, and Physical Activity**

Empirical evidence supporting improved body image has been demonstrated numerous times in studies on physical activity and breast cancer survivors (Dow, Ferrell, Leigh, Ly, & Gulasekaram, 1996; McNeely et al., 2006). For example, Sabiston et al. (2007) showed that women with breast cancer participating in dragon boating experienced altered physical self-perceptions. In addition, McDonough et al. (2008) reported that dragon boating increased breast cancer survivors’ positive physical self-perceptions; more specifically, fitness, strength, and sport competence. In McDonough et al.’s (2008) study, a few of the women reported that an athletic identity emerged as part of their physical self-perceptions and self-worth. They also found that dragon boating facilitated feelings of comfort and gratification, influenced by the shared experience with other breast cancer survivors. Despite the strengths of these studies, our understanding of breast cancer survivors’ body image through physical activity remains limited to a few dimensions of body image. These dimensions have focused primarily on physical appearance and physical self-perceptions. A sole focus on physical appearance and physical self-perception dimensions is a limitation because physical appearance and physical self-perceptions are just two components in a multidimensional framework of body image that contribute to women’s overall body image experiences.

Exploring the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors in endurance sporting events is important because, as the results of McDonough et al. (2008) and Sabiston et al. (2007) demonstrate, dragon boat participation in endurance sporting events creates an overall positive experience for breast cancer survivors. Endurance sporting events can provide breast cancer survivors an opportunity to explore their body image experiences in a comfortable and supportive environment. Furthermore, it is important to explore the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors in endurance sporting events because of how the sporting context provides meaning and significance to breast cancer survivors’ lives. Additionally, another important aspect and prominent theme

found in breast cancer survivors' body image experiences in dragon boating is camaraderie (McDonough et al., 2008; Sabiston et al., 2007).

According to the breast cancer literature, camaraderie is described as a shared breast cancer experience, social support, common bond, and sense of belonging (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002). Camaraderie is important to breast cancer survivors involved in dragon boating since it provides social support in the form of sharing a common goal and moving on with their lives after breast cancer (McDonough et al., 2011; Sabiston et al., 2007). Furthermore, McDonough et al. (2008) and Sabiston et al. (2007) both found that dragon boating provided the breast cancer survivors the opportunity to participate in a comfortable and supportive environment without focusing on their body-related changes and breast cancer experiences. However, to date there has been no known research that has explored the camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in a season of dragon boating. Therefore, narratives of breast cancer survivors and their body image and camaraderie experiences in endurance sports are the focus of my dissertation across two studies. Following a brief introduction to narrative research, I present a reflexivity section in which I share with the reader the lens I bring to my research. The main two studies of my research then follow, which highlight specific aspects of my theoretical lens and methodologies in more detail. My dissertation is concluded with a General Discussion section in which I integrate discussion across both of my narrative research studies.

#### **1.2.4 Narrative Research**

Narrative inquiry is defined as the study of human experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Riessman, 2008; Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2012). In my case, the human experience that I am interested in is the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors participating in endurance sporting events. Narratives are rhetorical or nonverbal accounts of our lives in the form of a story (Hardy, Gregory, & Ramjeet, 2009). As Polkinghorne (1995) noted, stories describe the human experience. Oliver (1998) and Riessman (2008) stated that the construction of a narrative elicits the framework of a story, consisting of a setting (i.e., where the story takes place), main and

supporting characters, and plot (i.e., the core of a narrative) where events and occurrences happen.

Stories allow voices to be heard that may be silenced and provide opportunities to connect with others (Frank, 2000; Oliver, 1998). Thus, the retelling of stories and voices within stories provide meaning to our lives and shape our experiences (Sparkes & Smith, 2011). Crossley (2000) suggested that the creation and account of one's story is a critical component in the development and perseverance of one's identity and sense of self because "through narrative we define who we are, who we were, and where we may be in the future" (p. 67). Recently, narratives have emerged in the sporting context as a unique form of qualitative research (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). Smith and Sparkes (2009b) stated that narratives are important in sport and exercise psychology because of the uniqueness of the context of sport. They also discussed how "the body is the storyteller, and it is partly through the tales it tells that we may interpret, give meaning to, and understand our bodies" (Smith & Sparkes, 2008 p. 19).

Narrative provides researchers with insight on the temporal, emotional, and contextual nature of experiences in physical activity and sport (Smith, 2010). In my research, narrative will help me to better understand the way in which the breast cancer survivors tell the stories of their body image and camaraderie experiences. Arthur Frank (2000) has used narratives to tell stories of illness (e.g., cancer survivorship) including stories of body experiences that occurred through illness (Frank, 1995; Thomas-MacLean, 2004). More specifically, Frank (2003) stated that narratives can provide individuals the opportunity to understand their illness and facilitate the process of healing and moving beyond their experiences. The use of narrative has also been demonstrated in Parry's (2007) dragon boating study, in which she presented nine narratives of breast cancer survivors. Parry's research showed that narrative is an appropriate methodology to portray the experiences of breast cancer survivors in endurance sporting events associated with breast cancer. However, prior to discussing the two studies of my dissertation (see Chapter II) and (see Chapter III), I present a reflexive section which details my path to my research question. Carolan (2003) stated that reflexivity processes are important to research because the researcher acknowledges the role and influences

that may be brought into the research. Furthermore, reflexivity adds credibility to qualitative research.

### 1.3 Reflexivity

#### The Early Years

Below are four journal entries and photographs that represent a glimpse into my life when I was first becoming a young woman and struggled with body image issues.

*February, 2001(15 years old)*

*All I think about is how much I want to be skinny and what it is going to take to get there. Is that too much to ask for? I am willing to do anything to get there. What I want is to be as thin as I was when I was 12, I do not like the fact that my body is changing, I want to be small and thin. I really want to wear the same clothes as I did when I was 12 (see Figure 1).*



**Figure 1. (Photograph: 12 years old)**

*May, 2001 (15 years old)*

*I started reading fitness magazines for advice on losing weight, they suggest running. I think that I am going to start running to the park everyday after school, I need to lose this weight fast. I am also going to start drinking more water and eating healthier. Today I saw a commercial from Special K, they said that if you eat their cereal twice a day you can lose up to 10 pounds in two weeks... hmm... I think that I am going to try this Special K diet along with running. Last night I made this really healthy lunch, but today I decided that I did not want to eat it, so I threw it away. Basically, the girls attacked me for throwing my lunch away and it was a pretty good lunch I have to admit, but they threatened to tell mom. Now I am feeling a bit nervous, but seriously they do not know what it is like to be this fat (see Figure 2).*



**Figure 2.** (Photograph: 15 years old)

*March, 2002 (16-years old)*

*I just weighed myself and finally I'm losing weight. I guess running and my eating habits are helping, but I still have more weight to lose. I think I am going to start running after I eat dinner as a way to burn more calories. Today mom came into my room when I was counting calories and she got mad at me, I think that she is starting to catch on, I must be more careful (see Figure 3 and Figure 4).*



**Figure 3.** (Photograph: 16 years old)



**Figure 4.** (Photograph: 16 years old)

*December, 2003 (17 years old)*

*Went to the mall this weekend and got a pair of gray and red Nike Shox. I love them, cannot wait to go running. Slowly but surely I am starting to lose more weight and look thinner. I think that I need to start skipping meals it will help me lose more weight faster. Tomorrow I will skip breakfast and lunch and only eat dinner. I wonder if mom will notice if I don't eat breakfast? Maybe I will pretend that I ate some cereal just like in one of those lifetime movies I watched. When am I ever going to feel thin enough? (see Figure 5).*





**Figure 5. (Photograph: 17 years old)**

### Back to Reality

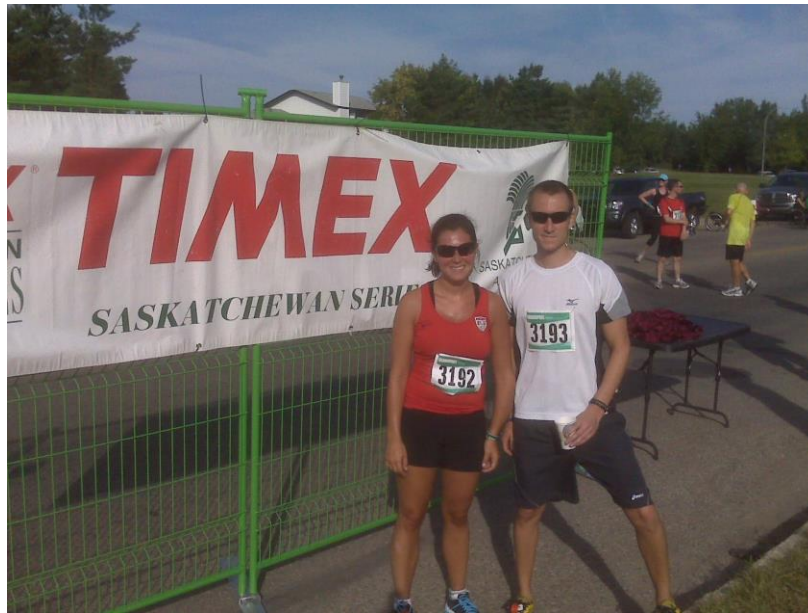
As you are reading this, you can likely see that body image has been a huge part of my life and remains so, which is one of the main reasons I have chosen to study body image experiences in my dissertation research. I still have struggles with my body image and will always be labeled as a “recovered anorexic/bulimic”; hence, that phase of my life will always be a part of me. Throughout this journey, I have been involved in endurance sports, in which I feel I was able to create positive body image experiences, as well as a growing passion for the ability to overcome some of the most challenging obstacles I have faced. To this day, I am almost always training for some type of endurance event; and once I complete one, I am eager to get back into training for another. Running is predominately my favorite endurance sport, and it is during my runs that I escape reality and let my soul run free. I have also participated in swimming, triathlons, and rowing. Endurance sport has brought me happiness and a way of life. I cannot imagine life without participating in some sort of endurance sport (see Figures 6, 7, and 8).



**Figure 6.**



**Figure 7.**



**Figure 8.**

My epistemological assumptions are congruent with those of Sylvia Blood (2005) who takes a social constructivist standpoint, recognizing that women's concerns and experiences with their body image are subjective. As a researcher, I bring this perspective to my work and understand that it fundamentally impacts my research. Each woman's experience of her own body image is going to be unique, and women have much to learn from one another by hearing about those varied experiences. I became particularly interested in studying the intersection among body image, women athletes, and endurance sports during my Master's Degree, and this interest has continued to grow throughout my doctorate. Increasingly, I am interested in learning more about the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors participating in endurance sports.

While I have not had breast cancer, the complexity of my history sparked an interest in exploring breast cancer survivors' unique experiences with their bodies. I know what it is like to deal with having consequences of scars on your body as a result of surgeries. As an infant, I underwent two open-heart surgeries to fix a heart defect. I refer to this scar as my "Frankenstein scar", which extends from the top of my sternum to my abdomen. Since childhood, this scar has bothered me...but it has also brought humor into my family. As my grandpa (who also had open heart surgery) would tell me, we share "zipper chests". To this day, I still hold that phrase dear to my heart as it brings a

laugh and smile to my face every time I reminisce. However, that scar is undeniably there. I cannot imagine my own body image without thinking of that scar down my chest.

In Michelle Tocher's (2002) book, *How to Ride a Dragon*, she discusses the stories of women with breast cancer and their dragon boating experiences. Tocher (2002) stated that participation in dragon boating provided the women the opportunity to "strengthen their spirits and open their eyes and their hearts" (p.150). In addition, dragon boating provides an escape for women to accept their cancer diagnosis while still being able to fight for their physical and emotional health, thus creating "life after breast cancer" (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002 pp. 50). Pursuing my dissertation in the context of endurance sporting events associated with breast cancer allows me the opportunity to become part of their community, witness a hands-on approach to qualitative research, and immerse myself into the endurance sporting environment and their experiences. Additionally, the endurance sporting environment promotes a comfortable and sincere atmosphere for breast cancer survivors to subjectively experience body image. McDonough et al. (2008) and Sabiston et al. (2007) demonstrated in their dragon boat studies that it is the shared experiences with other breast cancer survivors, as well as the social support, that creates a positive experience for women (McDonough et al., 2008; Sabiston et al., 2007).

The general paucity of research on the intersection among breast cancer survivorship, body image experiences, and endurance sporting events is somewhat surprising to me, since it seems like a natural intersection. As a result, the general purpose of my dissertation is to explore narratives of the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors in endurance sporting events. The purpose of the first study of my dissertation was twofold: (1) to explore narratives of body image experiences of breast cancer survivors in the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation CIBC Run for the Cure 5k, and (2) to identify a more specific research focus for Study 2, which focused on exploring the camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in a season of dragon boating. Study 1 explored *what* are the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors training and participating in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. The goals of Study 1 were to: (1) gain knowledge about the specific processes and methods of qualitative

research, (2) highlight the themes of Study 1 using a narrative approach that matched the goals of Study 1, and (3) to explore what is known about the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and what needs further exploration for Study 2.

First, Study 1 was designed to gain knowledge about the specific processes and methods of qualitative research such as interviews, building trust and rapport, and prolonged engagement to be used in Study 2. Further understanding the processes shaped the research design of my dissertation since unexpected factors such as recruitment, scheduling issues for data collection, and data analyses can require an altering of the research design. Sparkes and Smith (2014) have stated that one of the strengths of qualitative research is the flexibility in design, allowing me to make necessary changes as research progresses and unfolds over time. Second, I wanted to present the themes of Study 1 in a narrative approach that matched the goals of Study 1. Since the purpose of Study 1 was to explore the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and identify a more specific purpose for Study 2, I chose short individual narratives to highlight key aspects of the themes of Study 1. Specifically, the short individual narratives I present highlight the women's voices as representations of their body image experiences. I chose short individual narratives, in part, because the themes overlapped and would have been unnecessarily repetitive had I written longer narratives. Third, based on the findings, Study 1 provided insight into additional research questions that needed to be asked and answered for Study 2. As you will see, camaraderie appeared to be a prominent theme in Study 1, as well as featured prominently in the breast cancer literature. In Study 1, I learned that the three themes: *"new normal"*, *goal setting*, and *camaraderie* represented the overall positive body image experiences of the women and their participation in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. Camaraderie, represented the shared breast cancer survivors' experiences that allowed the women to focus on their physical capabilities, accept their bodies, and create an overall body image experience throughout their training in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. Since Study 1 found that camaraderie was a particularly salient theme to the women's body image experiences, further research was needed to explore what camaraderie looked like for the women and what constructs specifically represented the women's camaraderie

experiences. Additionally, it was important to explore the women's camaraderie experiences in dragon boating since the women referred to dragon boating frequently in their stories in Study 1. Since Study 2 was designed to further explore the women's camaraderie experiences beyond what I learned in Study 1, I wanted to represent the findings in a narrative approach distinct from Study 1. Therefore, I chose to write the findings of Study 2 in the format of camaraderie narratives (e.g., collective narratives). Taken together, Study 1 and Study 2 present narratives of the body image and camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in endurance sporting events.

## Chapter II

### Study 1: Exploring narratives of the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors in the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation CIBC Run for the Cure 5k

#### Abstract

Researchers have shown that breast cancer survivors experience significant negative changes to their body image due to surgeries and treatments and that physical activity might help to alleviate some of these outcomes (McDonough et al., 2008). The purpose of this study was to explore body image narratives of three breast cancer survivors participating in and training for the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. Methods of data collection consisted of two semi-structured interviews (pre-race and post-race), researcher field notes, and participant blog entries. Following Creswell's (2009) thematic guidelines for data analysis, three themes emerged: (1) *"new normal"*, (2) *goal setting*, and (3) *camaraderie*. The women reported that they had to accept body image and physical changes resulting from surgery, wearing prostheses, taking medications, and experiencing new physical activities specifically associated with breast cancer. They discussed how endurance sports helped them to achieve their body image goals including being healthy, staying fit, and controlling body shape. Camaraderie was identified as the shared experience of survivorship that helped participants come to terms with their bodies and capabilities to create an overall body image experience. The camaraderie that they developed together helped them to improve or maintain their body image while also providing hope and support for breast cancer awareness. Further research is needed on breast cancer survivors' body image experiences in endurance sports, and more specifically on the role camaraderie plays in those experiences.

## **2.1 Introduction and Review of Literature**

Given that breast cancer is the most common cancer among women in North America, it is not surprising that there are approximately 153,000 breast cancer survivors in Canada alone (CCS, 2012). Although survival rates have increased in recent years, breast cancer survivors often experience significant body-related changes associated with the breast cancer experience (e.g., weight gain, hair loss, mastectomy, reconstruction, lumpectomy) that can impact a woman's body image (Brunet, Sabiston, & Burke, 2013). Researchers have found that physical activity can alleviate some of the negative body-related changes as a result of cancer (McDonough et al., 2008). Recently, endurance sports associated with breast cancer such as running and dragon boating have become popular activities for breast cancer survivors (Parry, 2007; Susan G. Komen, 2012). More specifically, the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation CIBC Run for the Cure 5k is an annual race held across Canada to raise funds for breast cancer awareness (CBCF, 2012). However, despite the many demonstrated physical and psychological benefits of physical activity to health and fitness for breast cancer survivors (Brunet et al., 2011; Schmitz, 2011), little remains known about the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors participating in physical activities developed specifically to support breast cancer survivorship.

Body image is often considered a complex and multidimensional construct that includes body-related thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and attitudes including, but not limited to, one's physical appearance (Cash, 2004; Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). Body image remains defined in numerous ways within the psychosocial oncology literature making it difficult to conduct conceptually-driven research on body image and cancer (Moreira & Canavarro, 2010; White, 2000). Thus, Craig White's (2000) heuristic cognitive behavioural model, developed to guide the assessment, conceptualization, and treatment of body image disturbance specifically among cancer patients, is a useful framework for research in the area of body image and cancer survivorship.



In White's (2000) model there is both a self-schema (i.e., one's beliefs about the self) and a body image-schema (i.e., one's belief about her appearance) that govern how appearance-based changes resulting from the cancer experience are subsequently processed, with body image schema playing the most important role in shaping a cancer patient's personal investment in appearance-related changes and any self-discrepancy between the actual self and ideal self. The combination of schema and personal investment subsequently determine the types of cross-situational appearance assumptions that are made, which themselves shape subsequent thoughts and images relevant to that specific situation. According to White (2000), it is a cancer patient's emotional responses and compensatory behaviours that are ultimately impacted by this process. However, in addition to serving as a conceptual framework for my research, White's (2000) model also has important methodological implications to the study of cancer survivors' body image experiences. He stated that "cancer patients should be asked about their appearance concerns and if these exist, be given the opportunity to describe their thoughts, feelings, behaviours, life experiences, and beliefs related to appearance" (White, 2011 p. 336). White's quote emphasizes the importance of giving voice to women who are experiencing body image, a perspective consistent with Sylvia Blood's (2005) writings on women's body image.

Blood's (2005) social constructivist viewpoint emphasizes that women should voice their thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and attitudes about their own body image experiences. She suggested that women's body image is influenced by women's relationships, societal norms, personal experiences, and values and beliefs. Furthermore, Blood has critiqued the current assessments of body image, stating that the assessments create the assumption that meaning is singular. She described how questions in traditional assessments are forced-choice and produce specific responses that can exclude or suppress other responses. Hence, results of body image research are often simply representations of the original theoretical frameworks. However, even though social constructivism offers a potential approach to address Blood's critique of previous body image research, it also needs to be recognized that social constructivism assumes that realities are multiple, subjective, and entail co-constructions created by the researcher and participants (Creswell, 2009).

Like Blood (2005), White (2000) also discussed how current assessments of body image are not suitable for cancer patients because of their focus on weight concerns. More recently, according to White (2011) current assessments of body image are insensitive to the appearance and weight changes that are likely to occur as a result of time, cancer status, emotional functioning, social network, and relationship quality. Cancer-specific body image assessments such as the Body Image Scale (BIS, Hopwood, 1998) are exclusively designed to be more sensitive to the body image experiences of cancer survivors. However, little attention has been given to the BIS to better understand the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors and further research is needed (White, 2000). Indeed, most of what we know about body image and breast cancer survivors has not used standardized assessments when focusing on the broad aspects of body image and their quality of life (McDonough et al., 2008; White, 2000).

Much of the work on body image and breast cancer survivors has focused on breast cancer surgeries (e.g., Chen, Liao, Chen, Chan, & Chen, 2011; Mock, 1993; Moreira & Canavarro, 2010). This body of research has shown breast cancer survivors to experience poor body image and dissatisfaction as a result of undergoing breast cancer surgeries and treatments (Chen et al., 2011; Mock, 1993; Moreira & Canavarro, 2010). The type of surgery is an important factor for breast cancer survivors since it impacts their body image and how they view surviving breast cancer (Moreira & Canavarro, 2010). For instance, Chen and colleagues (2011) examined important factors (e.g., anxiety, distress, surgery type, and age) in the body image concerns of breast cancer survivors. They concluded that younger women who underwent mastectomy were more likely to have greater body image concerns and body dissatisfaction than older breast cancer survivors. Similarly, Moreira and Canavarro (2010) found that women with mastectomies also reported poor body image and body dissatisfaction, as opposed to women who had breast conserving surgery. Taken together, breast conserving surgery among breast cancer survivors seems to result in improved body image compared to mastectomies (Aaronson, Bartelink, van Dongen, & van Dam, 1988; Kemeny, Wellisch, & Schain, 1988; Mock, 1993). Although quantitative research has provided insight into the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors, Brunet et al. (2013) has acknowledged that quantitative research is limited since it does not provide the ‘what’, ‘why’, and ‘how’ of

breast cancer survivors' body image experiences. In order to address this limitation qualitative research is needed to understand the lived experience of breast cancer survivors and their body image experiences (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a).

In qualitative research, the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors have mostly been conducted in the context of dragon boating, demonstrating that dragon boating can improve the body image of breast cancer survivors (McDonough et al., 2008; Sabiston et al., 2007). In McDonough et al.'s (2008) and Sabiston's et al. (2007) studies, breast cancer survivors experienced increases in their self-perceptions from dragon boating, particularly improvements in the physical self-perception and physical functioning domains of body image. More specifically, the breast cancer survivors demonstrated increases in fitness, strength, and sport competence, which in turn increased their physical self-perceptions. However, the studies of both McDonough et al. (2008) and Sabiston et al. (2007) have three limitations that need to be addressed in future research. First, while their studies suggest that breast cancer survivors are more concerned about their physical self-perceptions and physical appearance than other dimensions of their body image experiences, Brunet et al. (2013) suggested that further research is needed to understand the thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviours of breast cancer survivors' body image experiences. Furthermore, Brunet et al. (2013) stated that White's (2000) model offers an appropriate framework to better understand body image from a broad perspective and how the dimensions in his model play a role in the complexity of the breast cancer survivor's body image experiences.

Second, the focus in McDonough et al. (2008) and Sabiston's et al. (2007) studies was limited to breast cancer survivors and dragon boating, at the expense of considering other sports. While their research has demonstrated that increased confidence from dragon boating can lead to participation in other sports (e.g., cycling, golfing, kayaking, running, and walking), it is these other sports that also promote enjoyment, social support, purpose, and confidence for breast cancer survivors (Courneya, Mackey, & McKenzie, 2002). Further exploration of other sports would highlight similarities and differences in body image experiences of breast cancer survivors from those that may exist in dragon boating, with the goal to provide additional opportunities for breast cancer survivors to adhere to physical activity guidelines, gain physical and psychological

benefits of physical activity, and increase their quality of life (Brunet et al., 2012; Courneya, Mackey, & McKenzie, 2002). A third limitation of the McDonough et al. (2008) and Sabiston et al. (2007) studies is that neither of these studies has used narrative research in their exploration of breast cancer survivors' experiences, thus creating a gap in the literature. Narrative research is one qualitative approach that is needed to focus on the lived experience of the women and their stories of their body image experiences (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a).

## **2.2 Narrative**

Narratives are part of our lives since we are storytellers by nature and they provide opportunities for individuals to make sense of their experiences and construct meaning from their stories (Frank, 2000; Smith & Sparkes, 2009a; Sparkes & Smith, 2011). Oliver (1998) and Riessman (2008) reported that narratives consist of a setting (i.e., where the story takes place), main and supporting characters, and plot (i.e., the core of a narrative) where events and occurrences happen. Narrative research in sport and exercise psychology provides individuals the opportunity to tell stories about their participation in sport and how it has shaped their experiences (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b).

Creswell (2009) and Riessman (2008) have stated that there are different types of narratives (e.g., short, long, individual, life story, and biography), and for the purpose of this study I chose short individual narratives. Individual narratives allow individuals to tell stories about events and experiences in their lives (McAdams, 2009). Further, individual narratives enable individuals to feel a sense of purpose in their lives (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). I chose individual narratives for this study for two reasons. First, the individual narratives addressed Blood (2005) and White's (2000) concerns related to better understanding the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors. Individual narratives provide individuals opportunities for their voices to be heard (McAdams, 2009; Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2012). It is important for the individual voices of the women to be heard to represent their body image and breast cancer experiences in an activity like the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k since there is no known research to date. CIBC Run for the Cure 5k is important to explore since it is another endurance sport associated with breast cancer that provides breast cancer survivors the opportunity to be

active, raise awareness, and promotes life after breast cancer (CBCF, 2012). Thus, CIBC Run for Cure 5k may provide breast cancer survivors similar physical and psychological benefits to dragon boating (Brunet et al., 2011; Schmitz, 2011).

Given that stories are a social phenomenon, individual narratives also provide women opportunities to discuss their body image as woman and breast cancer survivors (Elliot, 2005). This is important because women have different perspectives about their body image as a result of experiencing breast cancer and body-related changes (White, 2000). Thus, individual narratives allow women to tell stories of their perspectives and interpretations based on their lived experiences and offer insight to better understand their body image experiences (Blood, 2005; Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). Furthermore, individual narratives encourage women to tell stories of their body image experiences as breast cancer survivors, to which little attention has been given in the literature.

There has been no known narrative research to date that has explored the links between body image experiences, breast cancer survivorship, and participation in physical activity. Although McDonough et al. (2008) and Sabiston et al. (2007) have shed light on some of the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors, I embraced narrative as a means to demonstrate diversity within qualitative research on breast cancer survivors, body image, and physical activity that included narrative components (e.g., characters, setting, events, etc.) to bring the women's stories to life. Narrative helps us to better understand how breast cancer survivors view their body-related changes as a result of cancer. More importantly, narrative research allows further exploration into the lived body image experiences of breast cancer survivors in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. Since we are storytellers by nature (Hall, 2011), narratives provided the women opportunities to tell stories of their body image experiences in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k.

Although dragon boating has demonstrated positive body image experiences for breast cancer survivors (McDonough et al., 2008; Sabiston et al., 2007), CIBC Run for the Cure 5k is a different endurance sport that may provide unique body image experiences for breast cancer survivors and their participation. McDonough et al. (2008) and Sabiston et al. (2007) provided an important first step in exploring the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors in dragon boating, and highlighted the need to gain

further insight into the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors and their participation in endurance sporting events. An understanding of breast cancer survivors' body image experiences in endurance sporting events will be valuable to enhance their quality of life and their participation in physical activity. Therefore, the purpose of my study was to explore the narratives of the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors in the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. Since we know little about the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors in endurance sports other than dragon boating, I decided to specifically focus on body image from a broad perspective. The broad perspective of body image included the women's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviours. This is particularly important since breast cancer survivor's voices have rarely been heard about their body image experiences (Brunet et al., 2013). Narrative research allowed the women the opportunity to speak about their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviours about their body image then concerns for appearance (Blood, 2005; Cash & Smolak, 2011). Study 1 was conducted to accomplish three goals: (1) to learn what methods and processes worked in Study 1 that may or may not be appropriate for Study 2, (2) highlight the themes of Study 1 using a narrative approach that matched the goals of Study 1, and (3) to explore what is known about the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and what needs further exploration for Study 2.

Study 1 was designed to gain knowledge about the specific processes and methods of qualitative research, including the methodology (e.g., narrative) and methods (e.g., individual interviews, field notes, and prolonged engagement, etc.) used to collect data and present the findings. It was important to conduct Study 1 and learn about the processes that worked and did not work for my research design. More specifically, I learned that qualitative research has unanticipated factors (e.g., participant recruitment) and is flexible in adjusting to the needs of the study (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Eklund, Jeffery, Dobersek, and Cho (2011) and Sparkes and Smith (2014) have both stated that one of the strengths of qualitative research is flexibly in the research design. Given the complexity of qualitative research, Pitney and Parker (2009) stated that "researchers find it difficult to predict the people they will need to interview, the documents they will need to examine, and for how long they will need to conduct their observations in the field"

(Smith & Sparkes, 2014 p. 28). Since qualitative research is flexible in design, it is important to readjust focus on emerging phenomena that evolves as the research study progresses to best address the research question (Eklund et al., 2011; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Furthermore, Study 1 provided further insight into specific methods and processes such individual interviews, field notes, prolonged engagement that led to valuable experiences learned that shaped my methodological decisions for Study 2. In Study 1, the women's body image experiences were explored with multiple methods, including individual interviews, journaling, and attending a 10-week training clinic.

## **2.3 Methods**

### **2.3.1 Process of Study**

#### **2.3.1.2 Setting**

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) described setting as “the place where action occurs, where characters are formed and live out their stories, and where cultural and social context play constraining and enabling roles” (p. 8). In this study, the setting is the Survivor Clinic in Starshollow<sup>1</sup>. The Survivor clinic is a running clinic hosted by the Running Room<sup>2</sup> for the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k catering to breast cancer survivors, which is held each July through September. The purpose of the Survivor Clinic is for breast cancer survivors from the local community to train for the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k, learn about different topics and information that benefits their involvement in physical activity, and as a shared experience with other breast cancer survivors. The Survivor Clinic began 10 weeks before the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and ended on race day.

The participants and I attended the Survivor Clinic once a week for the full 10 weeks. Each session lasted for an hour, the first 30 minutes led by a guest speaker who presented the attendees with information related to running (e.g., proper running form). For the final 30 minutes of each session the participants and I completed running workouts led by coaches, aimed towards the final goal to run for the full 30 minutes,

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<sup>1</sup> Starshollow is a pseudonym for the location of this study.

<sup>2</sup> The Running Room is a Canadian running store that sells physical activity items (e.g., clothes, shoes, and accessories) and hosts running clinics for races.

following a dynamic warm-up (e.g., high knees). As an example workout, the first session consisted of running for one minute and walking for two minutes, repeated 6 times. Over the course of 10 weeks, the workouts progressed from running for two minutes to 10 minutes. After completion of each day's session, a cool-down was conducted that included static stretching.

### **2.3.2 Prolonged Engagement**

Prolonged engagement is defined as spending an extended period of time with participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Kielhofner (1982) stated that prolonged engagement enhances the research process via the intimate relationship that is formed between a researcher and participants. Thus, with prolonged time and increased rapport, participants may open up about topics that were previously too sensitive to discuss. For my study, prolonged engagement included attending and participating in the Survivor Clinics provided by the Running Room, taking field notes after the clinics, reading participants' blogs, conducting two semi-structured interviews, registering on the CIBC Run for the Cure dragon boat team, and running the 5k with the women. Furthermore, prolonged engagement with participants was considered particularly important for me to effectively and ethically discuss with the women their body image experiences as breast cancer survivors, observe their environment and behaviour, and immerse myself in the setting of their experiences.

### **2.3.3 Phases of Research**

This study consisted of three phases: (1) relationship building, (2) participant recruitment, and (3) data collection. The research process is presented in multiple phases to clarify the steps that emerged in this study. It is also important to highlight the initially proposed methods, so that readers can have a better understanding of how this research study was flexible and emergent over time. Furthermore, the three phases worked together to develop the narrative in the following ways: (1) relationship building led to plot-connecting events that unfolded sequentially over time and formed the telling of the stories, (2) participant recruitment allowed for a selection of characters for the narrative, and (3) the process of data collection allowed for a description and interpretation of the thoughts and actions of participants that formed the core of the narrative.



### **2.3.3.1 Phase 1: Relationship Building**

The relationship building phase focused on building relationships, primarily to establish trust with participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). However, the relationship building phase had two additional pragmatic benefits. First, the process of relationship building led to the unfolding of research ideas, which shaped the development of a research question that assessed the needs of breast cancer survivors' body image experiences in a sporting context. Secondly, Phase 1 was used as an approach to recruit participants for the proposed study.

The relationship building phase began when I responded (November, 2011) to an advertised position seeking a coach for a local breast cancer survivor dragon boat team. As a result, in February, 2012 I officially became the dragon boat coach for the breast cancer survivor team at a time when the team was starting their pre-season circuit training in preparation for the summer racing season. During this time, I worked hard to build rapport with the women and became interested in the women's experiences related to their participation in the upcoming Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation CIBC Run for the Cure 5k (to be held on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012). Specifically, I built rapport with the women by spending time talking to them individually and getting to know them personally. Since I coached the women's dragon boat team, I was able to spend time with them twice a week engaging in conversations about their lives and breast cancer experiences, including their interest in registering their dragon boat team for the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. From building rapport, I learned that they register and participate in the race primarily to promote breast cancer awareness and as a way to recruit for their breast cancer dragon boat team.

### **2.3.3.2 Phase 2: Participant Recruitment**

The criteria for recruitment consisted of: (a) previous experience with running races, (b) attending Survivor Clinics through the Running Room, and (c) an intent to run the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012. With the proposed criteria in mind, three women were purposely selected: Gwen, Mia, and Ginger.

Gwen is 63-years old. She is a retired businesswoman, married, and the mother of grown children. She was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2008 and underwent lymph

node removal. She began participating in physical activity as a child. Her current activities consist of running, dragon boating, and participating in the Canada Senior Fitness Games. She has run the CIBC Run for the Cure four times. She defines breast cancer survivorship as “a phase beyond time... an unsettling time, survivorship means you’ve conquered and indicates looking forward with your different body, and what it is able to perform”. Gwen described her body image with the following words: “strong, upright, meaning good posture, and it always helps with a smile.

Ginger is 46-years old. She is employed, married, and has grown children. She was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2010 and had a bilateral mastectomy. She currently likes to run, bike, dragon boat, and lift weights. She has run the CIBC Run for the Cure twice. She does not have a definition for breast cancer survivorship. She says, “I do not like the term breast cancer... I do not know how I define myself... its maybe kind of awaken me a bit to try new things”. Ginger described her body image as “I’m average weight, but not fat”.

Mia is 46-years old. She works at a school, is married, and has grown children. She was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2010. She underwent a unilateral mastectomy. Her involvement with physical activity began with swimming as a child. She has run the CIBC Run for the Cure twice. She defines breast cancer survivorship as “continuing on with a new normal because it’s not the same as it was...for the most part its moving on with the things you’ve been doing in the past to the best of your ability and maybe add some new things”. Mia described her body image “I’m average build and I’m tall”.

The three women selected were the ones who best met the criteria for recruitment on the breast cancer survivor dragon boat team, as well as were willing to share their experiences with me. Although there is no set number of participants to recruit for a qualitative study, researchers should try to select the appropriate number that will best allow them to answer their research questions (Patton, 2002). Also, in any qualitative study, the number of participants selected requires finding a balance between breadth and depth of experience that best suits the research questions being asked (Crocker, Mosewich, Kowalski, & Besenski, 2010). Thus, while having three women in my research might limit the breadth of understanding across a wide range of breast cancer survivors’ experiences, the depth provided by limiting the sample size is well suited to

narrative research (Sutherland, Kowalski, Ferguson, Sabiston, Sedgwick, & Crocker, 2014).

Prior to beginning participant recruitment, I received ethics approval from the University Behavioural Research Ethics Board; and prior to starting the first interview, the participants each signed a consent form and chose a pseudonym to protect confidentiality. The pseudonyms the women chose were Gwen, Ginger, and Mia. They were subsequently referred to by their pseudonyms in all transcripts, field notes, and blog entries, again in an effort to protect their confidentiality. Once the consent forms were signed and returned to me, the formal data collection process began.

### **2.3.3.3 Phase 3: Data Collection**

Smith (2010) stated that qualitative research often relies on interviews to collect data, but that researchers should consider the use of multiple methods when appropriate. Following Smith's recommendation, I incorporated multiple methods into my design (i.e., semi-structured interviews, field notes, and blog entries) as a strategy to collect the data used to tell the stories of the women's experiences. This use of multiple methods was particularly useful due to the complexity of the body image construct. Each method of data collection is explained below.

#### **2.3.3.3.1 Interviews**

Narratives are stories based on individual's experiences (Smith, 2010). I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews because they have the potential to capture the essence of the story and are designed to be an open-ended format that allows for flexible responses from participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). In my semi-structured interview guides (see Appendix D and Appendix E) my goal was to ensure understanding of body image as a multidimensional construct. This was addressed by using the dimensions in White's model (2000) (e.g., self-schema, body image schema, investment in changed body image feature, appearance, and emotions etc.) to guide the individual semi-structured interview questions used in Study 1. Specifically, White's model guided the interview questions that focused on the women's thoughts, feeling, attitudes, and behaviours of their body image. Example interview questions included: *"Explain what your body image experience with breast cancer was*

like,” and “How do you feel about your current body image prior to training for the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k?” The questions reflected aspects of White’s (2000) model since I used key words such as thoughts (“What is the relationship between breast cancer survivorship, body image, and “Run for the Cure?”), feelings (“What are some emotions that you experience in terms of your body image?”), attitudes (“Describe the overall investment that you have in your physical appearance”), and behaviours (“Explain behaviours that you engage in to control your body shape”) to further understand the women’s body image experiences.

I conducted the first interview a week prior to the start of the Survivor Clinic training, and the second interview on race day of the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. With the consent of participants, I utilized an electronic recording device when conducting each of the interviews, which lasted for a minimum of forty-five minutes and a maximum of one hour. The length of the interviews was consistent with previous research conducted on dragon boating and breast cancer survivors (McDonough et al., 2008; Sabiston et al., 2007). As mentioned above, the interview guides were designed to explore the women’s body image experiences both as breast cancer survivors and through their participation in endurance sport. The specific goals of the first interview were to: (a) further build rapport with the women, (b) have the women share their background in sports and physical activity, (c) have each woman describe her own body image, (d) have the women discuss what she thinks are the main influences on her body image as a breast cancer survivor and a woman, and (e) have the women discuss their goals and expectations for CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. The goal of the second interview was to: (a) further explore the intersection between breast cancer survivorship, body image, and their participation in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k.

#### **2.3.3.3.2 Field Notes**

Field notes are concrete, detailed, and nonjudgmental descriptions from observation (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). It was important for me as a qualitative researcher to keep consistent field notes, since I acknowledge my role as an instrument of data collection in this process of presenting the women’s narratives (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). My field notes were recorded in a notebook after each weekly

Survivor Clinic session and race day, in the form of both journal entries and photographs. In addition, the field notes included summaries of the information sessions, training workouts, and my personal observations. Wolfinger (2002) stated that field notes are used as a data source to inform decisions on background information, events, and details that may not be noticed by a researcher if not documented. In my case, the field notes provided me background information on events that occurred during the Survivor Clinic and the women's interviews, as well as on race day of the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. Furthermore, the field notes also enabled me to document details that occurred at the Survivor Clinic, interviews, and on race day that I might have otherwise forgotten. Thus, the combination of background information, events, and details provided descriptions for me to accurately portray the themes of the women's body image experiences in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. I chose the following examples of my field notes entries since they best highlighted the details of the observations and conversations that occurred between the women and I over the 10-week data collection period. I considered the selected entries to be the best examples since they captured some of the most memorable moments and experiences that occurred between the women and I as we trained and raced in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. The entries also represent a sampling of the different time points in the study. It is important to note that the sample field notes have been edited for clarity.

*July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011*

*"Today was the first day of the Survivor Clinic at the Running Room. Tonight, 20 women came to the clinic, the majority of them being from our dragon boat team. At the beginning of the clinic, two coaches introduced themselves and told us the structure of the Survivor Clinic for the next 10 weeks. The Survivor Clinic is every Wednesday and the first 30 minutes will consist of a 30-minute lecture on various topics such as running form, nutrition, flexibility, etc.; then the last 30-minutes will be running. The women and I are excited about the guest lectures since they will be on some interesting topics. The coaches talked about our running plan, which consists of walking one minute and running two minutes and slowly building up to 10 + minutes of continuously running. After the coaches*

*finished talking, we all ventured outside did a dynamic warm-up with jumping jacks and lunges and completed our first running workout. The women were talking about how much they have been looking forward to training for this race for a while since it compliments cross training for dragon boating. During the run, the women and I talked about how we will be with each other at least three times per week since we have dragon boating twice a week. I told the women that I hope they do not get tired of me, and they laughed. Once we finished running we spent a few minutes stretching and said our goodbyes since we will see each other tomorrow night on the river for dragon boating”.*

*August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011*

*“It is hard to believe that we are halfway through the Survivor Clinic. I really enjoy spending time with the women at the Survivor Clinic and dragon boat practice. We have a lot of fun together and share many laughs. Tonight, there were approximately 15 women that attended the clinic. We spent the first 30 minutes with a chiropractor talking to us about proper alignment and running form. It was very interesting since I have never been to a chiropractor before. After she talked, we went running outside along the river and it was a beautiful night. Gwen, Ginger, Mia, and I all ran together and had a good talk that made time go by faster. During the run, the women and I talked about how their training for the race had been going. Mia stated that she was able to complete two additional runs this past week and was feeling good about her progress. She even said training has helped her eat healthier and feel better about herself and her progress. Ginger said that she has been biking a lot around town and has also completed several runs in the past week. Gwen talked about how she is active every day and completes different activities and thinks the runs have been helping her with other workouts. We completed some hills in our run, and I did my best to motivate the women to push through as they made it to the top. Time flies when you spend so much time talking that the run is over before you know it. Tonight, was a good run, and the women have about four more weeks of training before race day. So far the women have been doing a great job during our weekly*

*runs together and are looking forward to running the 5k on race day in 40 minutes or less”.*

*September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011*

*“Today, was the Run for the Cure 5k. I cannot believe how fast the Survivor Clinic flew by. It feels like we just started last week. The women and I met at the race site around 7:30am and gathered at a table with the rest of our dragon boat team. It felt great to be back reunited with the dragon boat team, since we completed our dragon boat season a few weeks ago. As I looked around I saw other teams registered and everyone was decorated in costumes; there was lots of pink, sequins, fur, and pink ribbons. Half the fun of the race was watching how enthusiastic all participants were to be here for the Run for the Cure 5k. There were quite a few people at this race, including survivors and supporters. Prior to the race, the women and I spent time talking and taking team pictures. As the start time got closer, an instructor led a dynamic warm-up for participants that included jumping jacks, stretches, and some dancing. Then everyone lined up and the race started. I spent some time running with Gwen and Mia. We talked a little bit to motivate each other; and then all of us were quiet concentrating on our form and breathing. Part way through the race, the women and I got separated, but I made sure that I was at the finish line to encourage them and motivate them. I stood at the finish line yelling and cheering them as they finished the race. At the end of the race we all took a few minutes to get water and catch our breath. We gathered back at the team table and waited for awards to be announced. Sure enough, our dragon boat team won an award for raising a certain amount of money and we took a team picture on stage. That was very exciting and I was not expecting that at all. The women were very excited for their award. Overall, Run for the Cure 5k was organized well and I had a lot of fun. I can see why the women enjoy the Survivor Clinic; they can set individual goals for to accomplish in the 5k and have a good time. As I looked around, I saw a lot of camaraderie from the other survivors as they promoted breast cancer awareness and life after breast cancer”.*

### **2.3.3.3.3 Blog Entries**

Sparkes and Smith (2014) have stated that blogs are accessible, cost effective, and can generate a considerable amount of data. In my study, participants were asked to create individual blogs and provide entries throughout the 10 weeks of training, as well as following completion of the race. Two of the women completed entries in their online blog at least once a week, while the third participant chose not to blog. For the two women who completed individual blogs, they included images, photographs, and quotes related to their body image experiences as breast cancer survivors training and participation in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. The online blogs were recorded on tumblr.com and were initialized prior to the start of the Survivor Clinic training. Participants had control of their own privacy settings on the blogs, but made their entries visible to me as a form of data.

## **2.4 Data Analysis**

Narratives are understood and interpreted through the process of data analysis (Riessman, 2008; Smith, 2010). For the purpose of this study, the semi-structured interviews and blogs were analyzed following Creswell's (2009) thematic guidelines for qualitative data analysis. To begin this process, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Next, transcriptions, blog entries, and my field notes were first read to gain an overall sense of understanding and meaning, and then were re-read multiple times to note more specific impressions, thoughts, and ideas that emerged throughout this process. After reading through the data multiple times, the interviews, blog entries, and my field notes were coded using purple Post-It notes. More specifically, I identified broad themes in all three of the women's interviews, blog entries, and my field notes and labeled them with the purple Post-It notes. From there, I then read over the interviews, blog entries, and field notes several more times and labeled common themes using blue Post-it notes. I then took a blank piece of paper and wrote down the common themes that I found across the types of data. I then used another blank sheet of paper to break down the common themes into main and sub themes. Specifically, I listed the main theme and then organized the sub themes under the title of each main theme. I also spent time reading over the interviews and blog entries and looked at where the main



and sub themes occurred in the women's interviews and reflected on the context for each theme. I then wrote a summary of the main themes that included descriptions for the main and sub themes from the interviews, blog entries, and my field notes. A final reading of the transcripts ensured no further emergence of themes as well as way to confirm that the themes adequately represented participants' body image experiences in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k.

Creswell (2009) stated that there are many different approaches to writing narratives in qualitative research including fictional, long, and short narratives. For the purpose of this study, I chose to write the women's stories using short individual narratives because I wanted to tell the stories of each individual within common themes that represented their body image experiences. Individual narratives allow participants to talk about events and experiences and construct meaning from their stories (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009; McAdams, 2009; Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). I used research from the body image and breast cancer literature to guide my way of writing. More specifically, O'Shaughnessy, Dallos, and Gough (2013) used individual narratives to explore the experiences of women with anorexia. They choose short, individual narratives since they wanted to capture the women's experiences with anorexia and write the findings in a form that complemented each of the women's stories and common themes found in the data. Similarly in the breast cancer literature, McDonough et al. (2011) used short narratives to represent social relationships, social support, and posttraumatic growth experiences of breast cancer survivors involved in dragon boating. Additionally, Parry (2009) also wrote short narratives to represent breast cancer survivors' leisure, health, and spiritual experiences in dragon boating. McDonough et al. (2011) and Parry (2009) selected short narratives to focus on the interpretation of the breast cancer survivors' experiences and provided example quotations to support the details of each theme. O'Shaughnessy, Dallos, and Gough (2013), McDonough et al. (2011), and Parry's (2009) short narratives included descriptions and quotations that reflected the themes in the breast cancer survivors' interviews. Taken together, I used a collaboration of these three studies to guide the writing of the narratives in Study 1. A shorter narrative approach to writing the results of Study 1 also fit well with my overall goals for my research program, which was to use Study 1 primarily as a building phase for my main study, Study 2.

## 2.5 Results

The data analysis resulted in three themes, representing the women's body image experiences as breast cancer survivors participating in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. The themes included: (a) "*new normal*"<sup>3</sup>, (b) *goal setting*, and (c) *camaraderie*. The following results include a description of each theme, with quotations from the women to support these themes as representations of their experiences. Descriptions and quotes are identified as being from semi-structured participant interviews or blog entries.

### *The "new normal"*

The women stated that the "*new normal*" was an essential part of their breast cancer and body image experiences. The "*new normal*" was a term used by the women to describe getting used to body-related changes from cancer they faced as a result of medication and surgery. The women stated that they were adjusting to scarring from surgery and wearing prostheses. For example, Mia said, "My new normal is... I guess getting used to the fact that through surgery [unilateral mastectomy]... I mean I lost a breast, so physically that is my new normal having to wear a prostheses now". Ginger underwent bilateral mastectomy and said, "I got a new set of boobs. They are smaller and more comfortable. I feel like I am fooling everyone pretty good into thinking they are real. Sometimes when I am talking to people, I look at them and wonder if they can tell. I think to myself when they are speaking... I wonder if you know what I have gone through". Furthermore, the women discussed possible side effects from medication they are taking from undergoing chemotherapy. Some of the side effects included weight gain, decreased energy, and joint issues. Gwen said, "Well, I have a year and a half left on medications. So I am thinking the insomnia, the hot flashes, and some of the other inconveniences [knee joint issues]; I am thinking that it's going to be better in a year and a half". Gwen further explained that she is adjusting to the physical changes and side effects from medication that are a part of what she considers to be her "*new normal*".

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<sup>3</sup> Coincidentally, the "New Normal" is also the name of YouTube videos, ethnodrama, and Community Engaged Scholarship 4 Health document based at the University of Saskatchewan.  
<http://ces4health.info/find-products/view-product.aspx?code=DLFLZP5W>

The “*new normal*” also included participating in new physical activities, particularly training for endurance sports associated with breast cancer such as CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating. The breast cancer experience prompted the women to want to try new physical activities (e.g., CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating) to challenge themselves and move on with their lives after breast cancer. The women told stories of how they got involved in endurance sports associated with breast cancer. In Ginger’s words: “I’m rowing [dragon boating]. I mean, I never would have otherwise”. Mia also said, “I don’t think I ever would have joined dragon boating if it hadn’t been for the cancer diagnosis... for one I wasn’t aware of it to begin with, but I do enjoy it, and I would not have been involved in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k”. For Ginger and Mia, they both emphasized that they never would have participated in dragon boating or CIBC Run for the Cure 5k had it not been for their breast cancer diagnosis. Furthermore, Ginger and Mia said that they enjoyed endurance sports for the support and encouragement from other breast cancer survivors because they were working together as a team to promote breast cancer awareness.

The women continued to discuss the importance of the “*new normal*” in their body image experiences in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k because it was an environment where they felt comfortable and could share their body image experiences with other breast cancer survivors. Gwen described, “Finding someone with a similar experience in helping sort out prostheses or what happens if I get this surgery is needed through camaraderie”. For Gwen, sharing a similar breast cancer and body image experience with other survivors allowed her to feel social support and receive information in regards to body image changes from cancer. More specifically, the women frequently engaged in conversations on body image changes and provided one another with advice on surgery options and stores in which to purchase prostheses. Mia explained, “I am surviving and moving on and I think that is important and I hope I am setting an example for others going through it. I also think that support from others involved in the run or dragon boating brings about a more positive body image”. Mia further stated that it was important for her to be a role model for breast cancer survivors to demonstrate that they can survive and move on with their lives after breast cancer. Moreover, Mia said that her participation in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating created a social support

network with other survivors that has helped her accept her body-related changes and experience a positive body image. Ginger also said in her blog, “I like the [Survivor Clinic] program because I don’t feel that anyone is judging me”. The Survivor Clinic provided Ginger the opportunity to accept her body image changes as a result of cancer by participating with other survivors that shared similar breast cancer and body image experiences. The Survivor Clinic and CIBC Run for the Cure 5k was important to Ginger because she felt comfortable and safe around the other breast cancer survivors that understood her experiences and did not place judgment on her.

Overall, the “*new normal*” represented the women’s body image and physical changes from surgery and treatment for breast cancer. Additionally, the women stated that the “*new normal*” also included training and participation in endurance sports associated with breast cancer. In the women’s interviews and blog entries, it became clear that the “*new normal*” and idea of moving on with their lives after breast cancer started with goal setting and striving to achieve goals that focused on their participation in endurance sports.

#### *Goal setting*

All of the women stated that participation in endurance sports helped them to achieve their body image goals. *Goal setting* was a common term used by the women in the interviews. Some of the goals included: being healthy, staying fit, and controlling body shape. The women discussed the importance of these goals and how maintaining their health was keeping cancer from reoccurring. Furthermore, the women stated in their interviews how making healthy food choices and engaging in exercise made them feel better about themselves, and they provided examples of exercising and eating healthy. Mia said, “Just having been a survivor, eating healthy is giving my body more chance to fight off to keep the cancer away”. Mia also explained in her blog, “I’ve realized that when I fill my body with junk, I have a much poorer sense of self. And with that poorer sense of self, I feel sorry for myself; but when I break that cycle I am even proud of myself. I AM able to make choices and control what goes into my body”. Mia emphasized that being healthy and eating properly were important goals for her life as a breast cancer survivor since she prioritized healthy behaviours in order to prevent cancer reoccurrence. This was also important because she wanted to take care of herself and

increase her quality of life as a survivor. Ginger said, “It’s a lifestyle I’ve had forever... I just try to stay healthy. CIBC Run for the Cure 5k draws attention to the disease and promotes a healthy lifestyle and shows that there is life after breast cancer and being physical is something that anyone can do. If people battling breast cancer can do it, and do it well, then why can’t everyone!”. Ginger spoke about how she had participated in sports since youth and that being healthy was naturally part of her lifestyle. Furthermore, Ginger explained that CIBC Run for the Cure 5k helped her to maintain her goal of being healthy and exercising since becoming a breast cancer survivor because the Survivor Clinic held guest lectures on topics like nutrition and exercise to increase the women’s knowledge about how to promote a healthy lifestyle and increase their quality of life. Gwen also said, “I do it because I enjoy it, and I believe it keeps me healthy. I think it is a sign of weakness if you can’t eat properly and exercise”. Eating properly and exercising were key goals for Gwen as she trained for CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and participated in dragon boating because she enjoyed being physical activity and keeping herself healthy. Moreover, Gwen stated that when she eats healthy and exercises she is achieving her goals for her body, which led to a more positive body image.

The opportunity to stay fit was important to the women because they felt better about themselves after accomplishing the goals that they had set for themselves. During their interviews, the women often discussed that *goal setting* included getting in better shape and/or improving health. Ginger and Gwen described what fitness meant to them and the importance of it in their lives. For example, Ginger stated, “Fit means to me I can go out and paddle [dragon boating] and not be tired; I can run 5k or 10k and feel good when I am done. Survivorship is important, hopefully that’ll continue... just trying to stay fit. For me it’s more about the reason I probably do endurance sport or any sort of sport”. Ginger emphasized that she enjoys participating in endurance sports because the physicality of it increases her fitness, which provides her opportunities to participate in other sports and improve her health. Gwen also said, “I think it’s up to me to make it work better in physical progress. I just enjoy when the body responds to workouts. I think it’s really good when you’ve had a good workout and you go change, and you can hardly get your bra off because it is so stuck on to your skin”. For Gwen, it was important for her to be dedicated to her workouts and put in hard work and effort because

she liked the physical and mental changes from working out. More specifically, Gwen stated that through working out she has been able to achieve her goals of progressing in her training, such as increasing mileage on her runs, decreasing her stress levels, and improving her health in general.

Although the women recognized the importance of being healthy and staying fit, they also expressed a desire to control their body shape. Specifically, they discussed losing weight, toning up, and building more muscle. The women felt that controlling their body shape improved their body image and also made them feel better about themselves. Ginger described, “When I am in better shape and my body is fit I feel better and I do better. Sometimes you get to a certain sport and figure why bother. But when you know where it is you want to be, you work to keep it there”. For Ginger, controlling her body shape was important to her because she admired the hard work that she put in to achieve her ideal body shape. Her ideal body shape consisted of remaining slender and building muscle on her upper and lower body. Furthermore, the more fit Ginger was from training for the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating the better she felt about herself and her ability to train in endurance sports, which in turn improved her body image. Mia explained, “I appreciate the strength of my legs... I’ve got a stronger lower body and core”. For Mia, her lower body and core were important to her because she was most satisfied with these specific body parts. Additionally, Mia emphasized that participating in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating helped her maintain her lower body and core making her feel more comfortable with her body shape.

Contribution to a positive body image experience started with creating goals for themselves, dedication and hard work, and achieving their goals. Participating in endurance sports was an opportunity for the women to create goals and accomplish their goals, which led the women to have positive body image experiences. The women discussed some of their positive body image experiences that resulted from *goal setting* in both their interviews and blogging. Gwen explained in her interview that, “Body image is important to me in that the more fit you are, the more you watch your diet, the more you set goals and achieve your goals”. For Gwen, setting goals in regard to body image showed that she was determined and that she met her goals because of changes to her physique and progressions in her training for CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. In her blog,

Mia also said, “So, will running change my body image? I know there are things I cannot change, but of those things I can at least strive to change. Will I have the determination to stick with it? Only time will tell...”. Furthermore, Mia stated that she was willing to be determined and put in hard work in order to try to achieve goals that she had set for herself. More specifically, the goals were losing weight, increasing fitness, and eating healthy. As described by Ginger, “When I did the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k the first time during chemotherapy, I think it was just more to show that I could do it. I was really proud of myself, and it’s probably to push myself more to know I could still do it”. *Goal setting* was important for Ginger because it allowed her to focus on being physically active and proving to herself that her body is still capable of participating in endurance sports even after breast cancer.

In addition to what the women said about creating goals for themselves, endurance sport was described as a mechanism to achieve their body image goals. Ginger and Gwen discussed in their interviews their reasons for why they participated in endurance sports and the importance of their body image goals. In Ginger’s words, “I think that CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and all endurance sports are good to get women involved; and I think any women, especially if you’re a survivor, should be involved in some sports. Everyone has different levels of physical activity, but for me being in any endurance sport gives me the added confidence that I am doing something physical, and when I do good at it, it gives me extra strength to battle cancer and feel like a warrior!”. For Ginger, CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating has provided her the opportunity to be physically active, receive physical and psychological benefits, and feel a sense of accomplishment. Gwen also said, “I think endurance sports encourage an alternate method of improving body movements in the muscles that are used in most sports [heart muscles]”. Participating in endurance sports has shown Gwen that it can improve heart health, strengthen all major muscle groups, and reduce damage to the muscles from breast cancer surgeries and treatment. Moreover, Gwen stated that for these reasons breast cancer survivors should participate in endurance sports to improve their health and quality of life.

In general, the women described *goal setting* as a means to help them achieve their body image goals from participation in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon

boating. Furthermore, the women stated that camaraderie was an important component to the process of *goal setting* since the support of other breast cancer survivors facilitated their positive body image experiences.

### *Camaraderie*

The women explained *camaraderie* to be a shared experience of survivorship that helped them come to terms with their body capabilities, thus creating an overall positive body image experience. Ginger described in her interview an experience of *camaraderie* and the role that it played in her body image as a breast cancer survivor. She discussed wearing a swimsuit at her very first dragon boating practice and feeling self-conscious about how the other women would respond. “You feel like you belong for the camaraderie. The fact that I could belong to a group, that I knew and understood and could help and they did help me. The firsts that you go through for body image and being on a team, like a breast cancer survivor team. Things like that are actually really important. I may not ever have gone into a pool again”. Mia and Gwen also discussed in their interviews reasons why they participated in endurance sporting events associated with breast cancer and how those experiences and *camaraderie* shaped their body image experiences. In Mia’s words: “The support of the teammates, we’ve all been through it and that drew me into dragon boating. I enjoy it and I love feeling that you’re working together as a team. I have two groups of people I spend time with, one the dragon boat team and another group of ladies. We get together and support each other because we’ve all been through this, and that is a huge one for me right there, you know the camaraderie, the connection to help improve or keep my body image; I think that's for me”. Mia emphasized that participating in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating has helped her in terms of receiving support for information on breast cancer and body image experiences. Specifically, Mia felt a sense of belonging knowing that she felt comfortable discussing body-related changes from cancer, which has helped her accept her body and created a positive body image experience. Gwen said, “The camaraderie of just being in the community of others like dragon boating is visual for the community to see that there is life after breast cancer, and the girls are having fun, they are active, and are doing things that will contribute to a good state of mind which translates into a better state of body”. For Gwen, the feeling of *camaraderie* and support from other breast



cancer survivors facilitated a body image experience knowing that the other women are also striving to promote life after breast cancer, participation in physical activity, and improving their quality of life.

Each of the women described the importance of *camaraderie* to them personally, resulting from the shared support and experiences of other breast cancer survivors. The women reported that *camaraderie* was developed from participating in endurance sporting events associated with breast cancer and played a role in their body image experiences. As described by Gwen: “The people I’ve met as a result of having had cancer, whether it’s at the cancer clinic or with the dragon boat team, or just the Running Room, anywhere that you meet others who are at various stages of diagnosis, recovery, or treatment, you instantly sympathize every situation and hope that you can draw from one another”. Furthermore, *camaraderie* provided the women with shared breast cancer and body image experiences that allowed them to understand what each other was going through and offer support when needed. Mia explained, “I think that it is helpful, and I also think that support from others that are involved whether it be, the run or dragon boating, I think support is huge in bringing about a more positive body image”. For Mia, receiving support on her breast cancer and body image experiences from other survivors in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating provided her the opportunity to accept her body-related changes and feel more positive about her body image having been a breast cancer survivor. Ginger said in her blog, “ When I am participating in Run for the Cure 5k, I am proud of my body image. I am in an elite group of women (1 in 9) that share something very dangerous/deadly, yet amazing. No one with cancer knows how we feel and so at the Run for the Cure 5k, I am very proud of myself and my body image”. Participating in endurance sports provided a positive body image for Ginger since she engaged with other breast cancer survivors that shared a similar experience, and demonstrated to herself that she can be physically active and promote that there is life after breast cancer.

For the women, support was an important component of *camaraderie* since the women received it from other breast cancer survivors in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating. Moreover, the women valued *camaraderie* because of the support from the other women that helped them focus on their physical capabilities. More specifically,

the other survivors created a comfortable environment in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating for the women to have a shared understanding of what their bodies were physically capable of after undergoing breast surgeries and treatments. Additionally, the women felt more accepted of the body-related changes from focusing on their training in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating since the focus of the sports was not cancer itself, but breast cancer awareness, and life after breast cancer. It was apparent in the narratives that *camaraderie* enabled the women to accept their bodies as a result of cancer because of the shared experiences and support that facilitated the women's overall positive body image experiences.

## 2.6 Discussion

Previous research has shown breast cancer survivors to encounter negative body image experiences regardless of the type of surgery and treatment (Burnet et al., 2013; Chen et al., 2011; Moreira & Canavarro, 2010). Furthermore, researchers have demonstrated that physical activity can decrease symptoms from breast cancer and improve breast cancer survivors' body image (McDonough et al., 2008). Although few researchers have explored the links between body image, breast cancer, and endurance sporting events, the women in my research appear to have overall positive body image experiences in regards to their participation in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. More specifically, this study provided breast cancer survivors the opportunity to engage in interviews and blogging that explored their body image experiences during the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. These experiences were represented as three themes: the "*new normal*", *goal setting*, and *camaraderie*.

### *The "new normal"*

The women stated that their idea of a "*new normal*" is getting used to changes related to their bodies resulting from medications and surgeries, as well as moving on with their lives after breast cancer diagnosis. The "*new normal*" concept is not new to the breast cancer literature. For example, Mitchell and Nielsen (2002) found that through dragon boating, breast cancer survivors focused on moving on from changes to their physical capabilities as a result of breast cancer. They concluded that breast cancer survivors involved in dragon boating subsequently focused on increases in their physical

training and strength, which improved their overall health. In my study, the women reported that they were not only getting used to wearing prostheses and taking medications, but also getting use to how their bodies were physically functioning when engaging in physical activity and sports. Participating in endurance sporting events, such as dragon boating and CIBC Run for the Cure 5k, reminded the women that not only have their bodies have changed as a result of cancer, but that they are still able to participate in endurance sporting events.

An important aspect of the “*new normal*” seemed to be adapting to new things. As Sabiston et al. (2007) demonstrated, breast cancer survivors participating in dragon boating often report having new experiences and opportunities. Some of these new opportunities in their research included social, physical, and personal experiences that lead to positive psychological growth. Similarly in my study, the women reported that joining a dragon boat team and participating in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k offered new opportunities they otherwise might not have without a breast cancer diagnosis. More specifically, involvement in endurance sports helped the women to have new social experiences with other women, as well as challenge their physical capabilities as women with breast cancer.

Mitchell et al. (2007) stated that many breast cancer survivors are interested in being active in sports such as dragon boating as a way to cope with their cancer experiences. Similar results were demonstrated in my study, as the women stated that involvement in dragon boating and CIBC Run for the Cure 5k offered an opportunity to cope with their cancer experience in a comfortable and supporting environment with other survivors. Part of the “*new normal*” for these women was engaging with other women whom had similar breast cancer experiences in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating. As Mitchell and Nielsen (2002) stated, “there is life after breast cancer” (p. 50). It was in their experience of breast cancer that the women were able to share a common goal through the context of endurance sporting events.

#### *Goal setting*

According to the literature, there is only one study that has mentioned breast cancer survivors and the use of *goal setting* specifically. Burke and Sabiston (2010) stated that the breast cancer survivors in their research experienced an increase in their

subjective well-being during a climb to Mt. Kilimanjaro through the process goal setting. Subjective well-being is defined by Diener and Fujita (1994) as feeling satisfied or unsatisfied with one's life when involved in enjoyable activities. As a result of their nine-day climb, the breast cancer survivors in the Burke and Sabiston (2010) study reported the following as themes of their experiences: embracing life, gaining personal strength, gaining closure, feeling personally challenged, and experiencing personal control. Burke and Sabiston (2010) concluded that for women with breast cancer having the ability to experience increased subjective well-being is possible through setting goals that meet each woman's motivations and needs. The women in my study seemed to have a similar experience, in that they were able to improve or maintain their body image by setting goals that were individualized to their interests and desires.

It does seem a bit surprising that there is paucity in the literature linking breast cancer survivorship, endurance sporting events, and *goal setting*. Burke and Sabiston (2010) suggested that future research should explore the role of goal setting in breast cancer survivors and that it is important for breast cancer survivors to establish goals that are meaningful and have personal value. They stated that physical activity goals are particularly useful because they encourage progress towards physical health outcomes and enhanced personal growth. Additionally, setting goals helps individuals live a fulfilled life, which is especially important to breast cancer survivors and their quality of life (Burke & Sabiston, 2010).

*Goal setting* was critical for the women in my study because it provided them an opportunity to focus on something other than breast cancer. In Michele Tocher's (2002) book *How to Ride a Dragon*, goal setting was identified as important to combat fear of the unknown, which was a common metaphor discussed by the women in her work. Likewise, the women in my research explained that the fears they felt (e.g., being scared and anxious about the future) upon hearing a diagnosis of breast cancer required strategies to overcome the fear of the unknown. As a result, many of the women spoke about participation in dragon boating and how it was an opportunity, paradoxically, to reduce an emphasis on cancer itself and as a way to help them regain their life back, while at the same time sharing the experience with other survivors. For the women in

Tocher's (2002) book, goal setting was also a concrete approach for them to cope with the idea of a possible breast cancer reoccurrence.

### *Camaraderie*

Breast cancer survivors participating in physical activities, such as endurance sports, seem to share common goals with other breast cancer survivors, which ultimately led to *camaraderie*, the third theme of my study. Mitchell and Nielsen (2002) found that breast cancer survivors participate in dragon boating because of the shared breast cancer experience and to promote "life after breast cancer". Specially, *camaraderie* develops from the shared breast cancer experiences, common goals, and social support that the women receive from participating on the dragon boat team. In my study, the women often spoke about *camaraderie* and how it developed in their training for the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k, as well as via their participation in dragon boating. Furthermore, the women mentioned the importance of *camaraderie* and how the role of *camaraderie* created a positive environment for them to continue participation in endurance sports, feel proud of their bodies, and what they have gone through. The women in my study stated that *camaraderie* in Run for the Cure 5k, as well as their dragon boating, helped to create positive body image experiences. Camaraderie was demonstrated as a meaningful and valuable part of the women's breast cancer experience and involvement in endurance sporting events.

I found it particularly interesting that the women used the term *camaraderie* interchangeably with the term *social support*. However, in hindsight, this is not surprising since both terms are used frequently in breast cancer literature. For example, in Mitchell and Nielsen's (2002) study, women also used the phrase "social support" when describing camaraderie in their dragon boat experiences. Mitchell and Nielsen concluded that social support was a natural part of *camaraderie* for women and their shared breast cancer and dragon boat experiences. Similarly in my study, the women used the word "camaraderie" interchangeably with the phrase "social support" when describing camaraderie in their body image experiences in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. For the women, camaraderie consisted of shared breast cancer experiences and social support, which they experienced from participation in both the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating. More specifically, the women reported that sharing common breast

cancer experiences and receiving social support led to acceptance of their bodies and the body-related changes that resulted from cancer. Further, camaraderie was the motivating force that created an overall positive body image experiences.

Researchers have stated that social support and *camaraderie* are important to breast cancer survivors' participation in endurance sporting events associated with breast cancer (e.g., McDonough et al., 2008; McDonough et al., 2011; Mitchell et al., 2007; Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Sabiston, et al., 2007). For example, Mitchell et al. (2007) stated that social support is important to breast cancer survivors and dragon boating since the emphasis of the activity is not focused on cancer, but offers support similar to that of support groups. Similarly, McDonough et al. (2008) reported that breast cancer survivors enjoy participating in dragon boating since they are able to receive social support in regard to their breast cancer experiences. Mitchell and Nielsen (2002) found that breast cancer survivors included social support in their descriptions of camaraderie primarily because it was an important aspect of their participation in dragon boating. Furthermore, McDonough et al. (2011) explored social relationships in breast cancer survivors and dragon boating and found that camaraderie was repeatedly reported in their dragon boating experiences over a period of nineteen months.

Collectively, the existing body of research indicates that *camaraderie* provides breast cancer survivors the opportunity to be involved in a comfortable and supportive environment, regardless of their changes and experiences with breast cancer. Given the frequency of social support and camaraderie emerging as important to women in the breast cancer literature (McDonough et al., 2008; McDonough et al., 2011; Mitchell et al., 2007; Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Sabiston, et al., 2007; Unruh & Elvin, 2004), it is surprising that there is no known research to date that has explored the camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in endurance sports events. Future research is needed to better understand how camaraderie is defined in the context of breast cancer survivors and endurance sporting events and how social support is part of the women's *camaraderie* experiences.

### **2.6.1 Reflections on the conceptual framework**

My research was guided by White's (2000) model, which conceptualizes the multidimensionality of body image as it is applied to cancer patients and their affected body part(s). White's model is based on a self-schema (i.e., one's beliefs about the self) and a body image-schema (i.e., one's belief about her appearance), which initiates and will influence how the appearance-based changes resulting from the cancer experience are processed. My study was the first that I am aware of to apply White's (2000) model to breast cancer survivorship and physical activity. This was a limitation since White's (2000) model did not specifically focus on breast cancer survivors' and their participation in endurance sporting events such as the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. Despite this limitation, I decided to use White's model, primarily because it conceptualized the multidimensionality of body image in cancer patients. Since White's model focused on the multidimensionality of body image, I used it to assure the dimensions (e.g., self-schema, body image schema, investment in changed body image feature, appearance, emotions, etc.) were reflected in the women's semi-structured interviews. Specifically, I employed White's model to guide the interview questions related to thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and attitudes of the women's body image. I used each dimension of White's model to guide the interview questions to highlight the complexity of the women's body image experiences. However, since White's model was generally applied to cancer patients, it would have been beneficial for the model to focus on the dimensions as they apply to different types of cancer and affected body part(s). In my case, if White's (2000) model focused specifically on breast cancer then it would have provided a clearer understanding of the dimensions as they applied to the women in my study. I addressed this limitation by creating the interview questions as they fit the purpose of my study and the women's thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and attitudes of their body image experiences. In addition, it would have been beneficial if White's (2000) model had been used in different contexts including physical activity. Since research has shown that physical activity can alleviate psychological concerns such as body image from cancer (McDonough et al., 2008; Schmitz, 2011), further insight would have provided how physical activity can shape a cancer's patient body image and the role that it plays in their affected body part(s). Perhaps White's (2000) model could also include specific

dimensions, such as sport competences, physical strength, and physical conditioning, that play a role in the cancer patient's thoughts, feeling, attitudes, and behaviours about their body image and participation in physical activity. More specifically, these types of added dimensions (e.g., sport competences, physical strength, and physical conditioning) would provide further insight into the multidimensionality of body image in cancer patients and how training and participating in physical activity shapes their body image experiences. Based on my research, future research should continue consider using White's model to explore the multidimensionality of body image to better understand breast cancer survivors' body image experiences, as has previously been recommended (Brunet et al., 2013).

White's (2000) model also emphasized the need for a social constructivist perspective when exploring cancer survivors' experiences. This approach aligns with Blood's (2005) recommendation to provide opportunities for women to voice their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviours related to their body image experiences. According to Blood (2005), body image is not a "consistent and stable construct" (p.132), and because of this women can recognize the changes that occur over time and can better understand their body image experiences in a positive light. As the researcher, it was important for me to identify that body image experiences are complex and dynamic, to make sure that I was not directing the women to focus on one dimension of body image. To address this concern, I concentrated on the broader dimensions of body image in the women's stories, meaning that I framed the interview questions around the women's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviours of their body image experiences. Blood's work also informed my research by emphasizing the importance of allowing women to voice their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviours about their body image experiences, a gap that previously been recognized (Brunet et al., 2013).

Given that Blood's (2005) work focused on providing women opportunities to voice their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviours of their body image experiences, she has yet to address this concern of women's body image experiences being heard as it applies to women involved in physical activity and specific populations such as breast cancer survivors. Perhaps physical activity and sporting contexts provide women with unique experiences that shape their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviours about



their body image. Since researchers have shown that sports participation to help women develop a positive body image (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997; Greenleaf, Boyer, & Petrie, 2009; Petrie & Greenleaf, 2011), providing the women opportunities to express their voices in physical activity and sporting contexts may demonstrate body image to be experienced differently than in non sporting contexts. For example, women involved in physical activity and sports maybe more likely to voice positive thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviours about their body image because of physical skills (e.g., strength, speed, and agility) versus only on appearance (Greenleaf, Boyer, & Petrie, 2009).

A second critique broadly looks at qualitative research and social constructivism. Social constructivism has been critiqued on how reality can be understood and promotes knowledge since it lacks the objectivity and generalizability purported by positivism (Alexander, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 2002). Positivists have argued that social constructivism focuses on subjectivity and exploring human experience at the expense of objectivity and knowing “truth” (Alexander, 2006; Haverkamp & Young, 2007). Alternatively, social constructivists argue that providing a deeper level of understanding individual’s experiences is a priority over generalizability (Lincoln & Guba, 2002). Qualitative research has created resistance and confusion for positivists to understand how reality is socially constructed particularly using a social constructivism lens in health related research (Broom & Willis, 2007). Specifically, Broom and Willis (2007) stated that positivist health researchers have a hard time understanding how the experiences of individual’s with cancer are socially constructed. In regards to my work on breast cancer and body image, positivists might argue that body image is a fixed entity and that an individual’s thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and attitudes are measurable (Blood, 2005). Furthermore, positivists would likely suggest that the knowledge of women’s body image and breast cancer experiences is not found nor constructed, but that knowledge is objective and can be achieved from scientific method and quantification (Broom & Willis, 2007; Schwandt, 2002).

To address this debate, Broom and Willis (2007) stated that there are both subjective and objective aspects to health related research such as cancer. Quantitative and qualitative research each serve their own purposes and generate knowledge based on the chosen methodologies (Broom & Willis, 2007). Although I chose a qualitative

methodology and was guided by a social constructivist worldview, I think that quantitative research remains important to research on breast cancer survivors, body image, and physical activity; most specifically, because it allows researchers to make generalizations about their research (Lincoln & Guba, 2002). In addition, quantitative approaches would allow for the testing of any potential essential structures underlying women's body image experiences and their participation in physical activity. Essential structures is a term used in empirical phenomenology to describe the components that make up the essential structures of individual's experiences (Berry, Kowalski, Ferguson, & McHugh, 2010; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

According to the literature (Mitchell et al., 2007; McDonough et al., 2008; Parry, 2007; Sabiston et al., 2007), social support is important to breast cancer survivors because they receive informational support (e.g., cancer treatments and surgeries) and emotional support (e.g., empathy) from the other women participating in the physical activity. Some of the essential structures that are important to the women's experiences and participation may include informational support, emotional support, and social integration (Holland & Holahan, 2003; McDonough et al., 2008; McDonough et al., 2011; Sabiston et al., 2007). This is consistent with Holland and Holahan's (2003) study that found the social provisions of attachment, reassurance of worth, social integration, and guidance to be important to the social support of breast cancer survivors. The women in their study reported that attachment, reassurance of worth, social integration, and guidance resulted in greater perceived social support and psychological well-being. Furthermore, testing some of these essential structures would help better understand the relationship between variables and the types of social support that the women experience from participating in physical activity.

An example of a potential direction that might be particularly well-suited to quantitative research is the development of a body image and cancer questionnaire based on White's (2000) heuristic body image model, specifically one assessing the multidimensionality of body image among a cancer population. This type of instrument development might be useful in tracking of specific body-related changes resulting from cancer (White & Hood, 2011). I offer this recommendation with caution, however, because, Blood (2005) has critiqued quantitative research stating that it objectifies

women's bodies at the expense of their lived experiences. Having said this, I would argue that quantitative research generates important knowledge on the relationships between variables, such as between women's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviours about their body image and the changing physical body. Furthermore, creating a multidimensional body image and cancer questionnaire, perhaps one similar to Cash and colleagues' Multidimensional Body Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ), based on White's (2000) model would move the field forward by endorsing the multidimensionality of cancer patient's body image and comprehensively highlight the body image variables that are important to cancer patient's body image experiences.

Additionally, it seems important to assess social support variables, since the women in my study frequently spoke about the social support they received from other women in both the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating. Researchers have shown social support to be an important determinant of women's participation in physical activity (e.g., Penedo & Dahn, 2005). Furthermore, measuring social support would also derive results that may include how frequent the breast cancer survivors are receiving social support over a given period of time and provide insight into breast cancer survivors' motivation to participate and adherence to physical activity (Eyler, Brownson, Donatelle, King, Brown et al., 1999). This would also lead to further understanding of breast cancer survivors' body image experiences, since the women have stated that informational and emotional support plays an important role in their participation, especially in helping them relate to one another in their body image and breast cancer experiences (McDonough et al., 2011; Parry, 2007; Sabiston et al., 2008). Overall, quantitative and qualitative research methods are important to the future development of body image and breast cancer research because they both generate knowledge that contribute to the understanding of body image and body-related changes from cancer and how they can impact breast cancer survivors' quality of life.

### **2.6.2 Trustworthiness**

Six of Creswell's (2009) strategies of trustworthiness seem particularly relevant to evaluate Study 1 of my research, including triangulation, prolonged engagement, member checking, the use of rich thick descriptions, peer debriefing, and clarifying bias. First,

triangulation was achieved via four types of data collection (i.e., observation, field notes, interviews, and blog entries) to help justify the merits of the three themes. I further enhanced triangulation by spending a significant amount of time with the women building trust and rapport, documenting field notes, and interviewing the women, leading to detailed and rich data. My data collection phase lasted for three months, beginning when I first attended the Survivor Clinic and dragon boat practices with the women. At all Survivor Clinic and dragon boat practices, I carried a small notebook to record notes that consisted of details from practices and conversations, a process recommended by others (e.g., Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; George, 2005; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). After practices, I reflected on my jottings and typed them into full field notes in a Word document.

Second, prolonged engagement was accomplished through spending 10 weeks training with participants during relationship building. It was important for me to build rapport with participants to understand their experiences (Creswell, 2009). Prolonged engagement consisted of spending three months in the field with the women exploring their body image experiences in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. I built trust and rapport with the women by engaging in conversations and getting to know each of them personally during 10 weeks of the Survivor Clinic. This allowed the women to feel comfortable openly discussing their body image experiences with me. Furthermore, persistent observation was important to help me better understand CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and the Survivor Clinic, which allowed for a meaningful and worthwhile time in the field. Additionally, the quality of the relationships that I developed with the women was crucial for the success of this study.

Third, member checking was completed after data collection to give participants an opportunity to look over the themes and descriptions and to make corrections if needed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Following the second individual interview, I provided the women the opportunity to member check their stories. I scheduled individual meetings with the three women and discussed the three emergent themes. I then asked the women if my interpretations were accurate representations of their body image experiences, a point at which the women were given the opportunity to make changes or corrections to their comments prior to signing the

transcript release forms. None of the women requested changes to their comments, but this was still an important strategy that allowed me to have more confidence in the themes resulting from my data analysis.

Fourth, the use of rich thick descriptions communicated the findings and enabled discussion of the participants' experiences to be shared in a narrative format (Creswell, 2009). I decided to write the results as short individual narratives since they focused on the individual stories of the three women (McAdams, 2009). The goal of the individual narratives was to take readers on a short journey by contextualizing the setting of the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and Survivor Clinic, methods, participants, and results (Creswell, 2009). This approach allowed me to represent the women's body image experiences as individual voices, thus enabling me to write stories of the women's body image experiences and provide readers opportunities to draw their own conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Fifth, peer debriefing was achieved through review sessions with my supervisor and committee members on methods, meanings, and interpretations based on the data analysis process. Marshall and Rossman (2011) stated that peer debriefing ensures accuracy in the data. My doctoral supervisor and I engaged in on-going conversations frequently during the research process. At the beginning of the study, we discussed biases that I may have missed since I was focused on details of the study, trust and rapport, methodological decisions, and my understanding of the area of study (Spall, 1998). As the study progressed, our meetings focused on interview questions, scheduling individual interviews, observations, personal support, alternative approaches, and data analyses (Spall, 1998). Peer debriefing was crucial to this study and confirmed that the findings were credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Lastly, I clarified my own biases by highlighting my body image experiences as an endurance athlete, as well as described the methodological decisions and justification for those decisions in a reflexive journal throughout the research process (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Carolan (2003) stated that reflexivity is an important part of trustworthiness that adds credibility to qualitative research. I rigorously recorded and reflected on each encounter that I had with my participants during the research process (Carolan, 2003). I also reflected on my worldview,

assumptions, thoughts, feelings, and experiences in the field that should help the readers understand the perspective from which I portrayed my findings and conclusions (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since reflexivity was important in my research, I shared some of my own story in Section 1.3 of my dissertation, which provides the reader a look through the lens that I brought to my work.

### **2.6.3 Limitations**

Despite the strengths of this study, it also has limitations. First, due to the complexity of breast cancer survivors' body image experiences, in hindsight it would have been beneficial to conduct another individual semi-structured interview at four weeks into the study to further enrich the narratives of the women's body image experiences during the Survivor Clinic training. Conducting another interview, especially around the mid-point of training, would have allowed me to better understand the transformation of the women's experiences as they trained for the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. Research in dragon boating has shown that breast cancer survivors experienced transformations in their physical self-perceptions, physical competences and fitness, and athletic identity over time (McDonough et al., 2008; Sabiston et al., 2007). Perhaps, similar transformations, such as increased physical self-perceptions, physical competences, and athletic identity, occurred at the mid-point in the women's training for the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k that might have been missed due to my chosen methodology, even though I was with them throughout the entire training phase. Transformation is important to explore since McDonough's et al. (2008) and Sabiston's et al. (2007) studies have both shown that body image transformations exists in endurance sporting events and at different points of time. Hence, an additional interview would have provided further insight into the transformations and complexity of breast cancer survivors' body image experiences in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. However, to address this limitation, researchers in the future need to consider practical issues such as the timing and number of interviews that they would include so that any approach is appropriate to the participants in their research.

Another limitation of this study was the selection of the creative practice activity, blogging. Creative practice activities offer opportunities to use imagination, while

representing experiences and events of our lives in qualitative research (Janesick, 2007). Blogging is a flexible and convenient approach for participants to journal their experiences (Hookway, 2008). Furthermore, I selected blogging as the creative practice activity since it allowed the women to journal virtually and reflect on their breast cancer and body image experiences during the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k (Sullivan, 2005). However, blogging was somewhat of a limitation in this study in that two of the three women completed blog entries during the data collection process. For the other participant, blogging was not a good fit for her as a creative practice activity. Having said this, the other two women did complete their blog entries and included images, photographs, and quotes on their body image experiences as breast cancer survivors training and participation in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. Nonetheless, this limitation can be addressed by selecting a creative practice activity that resonates with all participants and fits their needs and interests when conducting research.

#### **2.6.4 Future Directions**

Findings from this study can be used to inform future research directions. First, it is important to further explore the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors involved in other sports. McDonough et al. (2008) stated that breast cancer survivors participate in a variety of physical activities and sports (e.g., cycling, golfing, kayaking, running, and walking) as a result of confidence gained through participation in dragon boating. There is evidence of physical and psychological benefits associated with sports and physical activities among breast cancer survivors, including enjoyment, social support, purpose, confidence, and increased positive body image (Courneya, Mackey, & McKenzie, 2002; Schmitz, 2011), and research has shown participation in sports can lead to positive body image experiences for women (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997; Greenleaf, Boyer, & Petrie, 2009; Petrie & Greenleaf, 2011). More specifically in the breast cancer literature, participation in dragon boating increased breast cancer survivors' physical self-perceptions and sport competences (McDonough et al., 2008; Sabiston et al., 2007). Perhaps, exploring the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors in other sports would facilitate similar or different experiences found in dragon boating and CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. This is important because sports and physical activity can

provide opportunities for breast cancer survivors to experience many physical and psychological benefits of exercise including a positive body image (Schmitz, 2011; Brunet et al., 2011).

Second, future researchers may want to consider the exploration of camaraderie in endurance sports, particularly dragon boating. Camaraderie is a common theme found in the breast cancer literature (McDonough et al., 2011; Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Sabiston et al., 2007; Unruh & Elvin, 2004) and obviously holds a strong relationship to dragon boating. In the breast cancer literature, camaraderie is frequently described as social support, a sense of belonging, and togetherness (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Unruh & Elvin, 2004; McDonough et al., 2011). Camaraderie is important to breast cancer survivors participating in dragon boating since it provides social support and a common goal of moving on with lives after breast cancer (McDonough et al., 2011; Sabiston et al., 2007). Furthermore, dragon boating provides breast cancer survivors the opportunity to participate in a comfortable and supportive environment without focusing on their body-related changes and breast cancer experiences (McDonough et al., 2008; Sabiston et al., 2007). However, to date there has been no known research that has explored the camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in a season of dragon boating.

### **2.6.5 Summary**

While previous research has shown the positive experiences of participation in endurance sporting events for breast cancer survivors, the purpose of Study 1 of my dissertation was to explore narratives of the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors in the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. Three themes emerged as part of the women's body image experiences with breast cancer: the *"new normal"*, *goal setting*, and *camaraderie*. This study contributes to the literature by providing insight into the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors in a different endurance sporting event: the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. The women in my study showed that breast cancer survivors value participation in endurance sporting events associated with breast cancer for a number of reasons, including the camaraderie and the overall positive body image experiences. As researchers it is important to explore possible opportunities, such as those found in endurance sports, for breast cancer



survivors to win their life back from cancer, since it is considered a vital component to their survivorship (Tocher, 2002). As Gwen summarizes from her interview in my Study 1, “Endurance sports are a visual for the community to see that there is life after breast cancer and the girls are having fun, they’re active, outgoing, and they are doing all the things that contributes to a good state of mind, which translates to a better state of body”.

## **2.6.6 Bridging Summary**

Study 1 led to finding of camaraderie as playing a particularly important role in the women’s body image experiences and participation in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. While the main focus of Study 1 was on the women’s body image experiences, that research led to a more specific focus on camaraderie in Study 2. I learned in Study 1 that camaraderie represented the shared breast cancer survivors’ experiences that allowed the women to focus on their physical capabilities, accept their bodies, and create overall body image experiences. It became apparent that camaraderie was a particularly important theme to the women throughout their training. Thus, Study 2 of my dissertation was subsequently designed to better understand the camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors, with a lesser focus specifically on body image. Body image was still important to the women’s camaraderie experiences in that the women were able to accept their bodies regardless of shape and size; however, it was impacted significantly by the camaraderie that they experienced on their dragon boat team. Thus, I decided to change the primary research question in Study 1 (i.e., What are the body image and camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in a season of dragon boating?) to Study 2 (i.e., What are the camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in a season of dragon boating?). The change in research questions allowed me to readjust focus on camaraderie and the importance of the phenomena in the women’s experiences. Given that qualitative research is flexible, changing research questions is sometimes needed to fit the needs of the research design (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

Also, despite a focus on an endurance running event in Study 1, dragon boating was an important endurance sporting event to the women in the study, as evidenced by them talking frequently about dragon boating in their stories. As they discussed, dragon boating provided them opportunities to be physically active and participate in an

endurance sport with other breast cancer survivors with a focus on moving on with their lives after breast cancer. Furthermore, the women spent a significant amount of time with other women training and competing for dragon boat races, in addition to their running training.

Given that camaraderie has been frequently used in the literature (literature (McDonough et al., 2011; Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Sabiston et al., 2007; Unruh & Elvin, 2004), it is surprising what little attention has been given as to what constructs specifically represent camaraderie. According to the literature (e.g., Culos-Reed et al., 2005; McDonough et al., 2008; McDonough, et al., 2011; Sabiston et al., 2007), camaraderie appears to have some overlap with constructs such as social support and cohesion; however, these relations are not clear. Hence, further research is needed to explore the relationship between social support and cohesion and the role they play in the breast cancer survivors' camaraderie experiences. Further, based on the results of Study 1, I decided it would be beneficial to explore the camaraderie experiences of a breast cancer survivor dragon boat team in Study 2 over the course of an entire season of dragon boating, especially as a way to better understand the dynamics and transitions that occur between pre-season dragon boating (e.g., February-April) and the official dragon boat season (May-August). Williams (2006) stated that interpersonal relationships, team roles, group norms, and communication are common transitions that occur in sports. Therefore, it is important to consider conducting interviews at different points of time to focus on the transitions from pre-season training to the official dragon boat season (Kleinert, Ohlert, Carron, Eys, Feltz, et al., 2012), a strategy I tried to adopt in Study 2.

Sparkes and Smith (2014) stated that narratives focus on stories told by people and their experiences. The narrative approach I used in Study 1 and Study 2 were different since the women and the goals of each study were different. It was important for the goals of Study 1 and Study 2 to align with the narrative presentation because I wanted to present the findings of each study in a format that complemented the women's experiences across both studies. Furthermore, Smith (2010) suggested that qualitative researchers broaden the representation of findings in narrative research to enhance individual's lives and expand qualitative research in sport and exercise psychology. Study 1 and Study 2 contributed to qualitative research in sport and exercise psychology

since the findings of both studies are unique and best fit the women and goals of my studies.

In Study 1, the results section was written in short individual narratives. The reasoning for this was the individual narratives matched the goals of Study 1, which included asking and answering main questions needed as a preliminary investigation to identify a more specific purpose for Study 2. The individual narratives in Study 1 provided opportunities for the women to further enhance understanding their breast cancer and body image experiences (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). Gubrium and Holstein (2009) stated that narratives are “short or long, simple or complex as stories can be in practice, they are put together, and communicated in some fashion (p. 42). Prior to the completion of analyzing data, I originally planned to write the results section as individual stories of the women telling their own body image experiences (e.g., Mia’s story, Gwen’s story, and Ginger’s story). However, after analyzing data, the women’s stories and themes overlapped, thus creating many similarities in the women’s stories. Therefore, I decided to write the results section in Study 1 as short individual narratives that represented the common themes found in all three of the women’s stories and experiences. Further the short individual narratives best fit the voices of the women around the themes similar to the body image literature. For instance, O’Shaughnessy, Dallos, and Gough (2013) and McDonough et al. (2011) both used short individual narratives to portray women’s body image and breast cancer survivors’ experiences in a narrative approach that aligned with the women’s stories and common themes found in the data. However, I acknowledge that the findings of Study 1 only represent one of many possible interpretations (Riessman, 2008). Regardless writing short individual narratives allowed me to gain insight into *what* were the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k further leading to a more a specific purpose focused on *camaraderie* for Study 2.

For Study 2, the results section is written as camaraderie narratives (e.g., collective narratives). Collective narratives consist of shared stories that include multiple individual’s perspectives and have been used in research that focuses on traumatic life events (e.g., holocaust survivors) (Bruner, 1999; Schiff & Noy, 2006). I chose camaraderie narrative because they align with the goals of Study 2 to answer the

following research question: *what are the camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in a season of dragon boating* and to highlight each of the woman's voices from a group perspective. My decision to use a different narrative approach for Study 2 stemmed from the differences in the focus of the studies. More specifically, Study 1 focused on the individual stories of three breast cancer survivors where as Study 2 focused on a team narrative. The camaraderie narratives are written as more traditional narratives since the themes focused on each woman's voice from a group perspective that portrays the transitions that occurred throughout the course of the dragon boat season. Furthermore, the camaraderie narratives were the best approach to write stories of the themes that best fit the voices of the women in my study. Overall, Study 1 and Study 2 were taken together in different narrative approaches to understand the body image and camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in endurance sporting events.

## Chapter III

### Study 2: Exploring camaraderie narratives of breast cancer survivors in a season of dragon boating

#### Abstract

Survivorship is an important part of a breast cancer survivor's experience (Parry, 2007). According to statistics, 1 in 9 women in North America are diagnosed with breast cancer (ACS, 2012; CCS, 2012). While survival rates are increasing, so is the importance of survivorship for breast cancer survivors (Brunet et al., 2013; Parry, 2007). A physical activity that celebrates survivorship for breast cancer survivors is the sport of dragon boating (McKenzie, 1998; Parry, 2009). The purpose of this study was to explore the camaraderie narratives of breast cancer survivors in a season of dragon boating. A group of 11 women formed a core group and were the primary participants in three semi-structured focus group interviews and one creative practice activity. Following Smith and Sparkes's (2012) guidelines for holistic analysis of content, five themes emerged: *attention please*, *paddles up*, *take it away*, *hold the boat*, and *reach*. First, *attention please* represented the women's reasons for why they were attracted to dragon boating, including a shared breast cancer experience, physical activity, and fun. Second, *paddles up* was a metaphor used by the women to represent common bond. The women discussed the common bond of the shared experience of breast cancer, giving and receiving guidance from one another on the team, sharing the team goal of life after breast cancer, and the commitment and hard work that they dedicated to their team. Third, *take it away* was a metaphor for friendship, which the women described as loving and caring for one another as well as having faith and belief in themselves and their team. Fourth, *hold the boat* represented social support, consisting of the shared experience of breast cancer and dragon boating, sharing and providing knowledge, informational support, encouragement, and meeting new people. Fifth, *reach* represented the women's personal strength, which consisted of feelings of accomplishment, fighting for breast cancer and moving on with their lives, taking care of themselves, and positive environment and positive energy. Additionally, the results of this study filled a gap in the

breast cancer literature by specifically focusing on what camaraderie is and what the camaraderie experiences look like for a breast cancer survivor team over the course of a season of dragon boating. Furthermore, findings from this study provided a foundation of camaraderie to help guide the development of future research on breast cancer survivors and dragon boating.

### **3.1 Introduction and Literature Review**

The term “survivor” is commonly associated with breast cancer since it has one of the largest populations of cancer survivors (Kaiser, 2008; King, 2006). There are approximately 2.5 million breast cancer survivors in the United States, and approximately 153,000 breast cancer survivors in Canada alone (ACS, 2012; CCS, 2012). While statistics demonstrate that breast cancer continues to affect women all over the world, the importance of survivorship is key to a breast cancer survivor’s well-being (Parry, 2009). The National Cancer Institute (2013) in the United States defined breast cancer survivorship as life in health after a cancer diagnosis and once treatment is over. Research has shown one way that breast cancer survivors celebrate their survivorship is through participation in the sport of the dragon boating (McKenzie, 1998; Parry, 2009).

Dragon boating has historical roots dating back to over 2,000 years ago in China (International Dragon Boat Federation [IDBF], 2013). The traditional dragon boat festivals are a reenactment of men, in their dragon boats, saving the body of poet Qu Yuan from a water dragon (Chan & Humphries, 2009; IDBF, 2013; Latsch, 1984). Dragon boating is now an international water sport that consists of 18-20 paddlers, plus a drummer and a steersperson (IDBF, 2013; McKenzie, 1998). Each boat resembles a dragon, as it is rigged with a dragon’s head at the bow and a tail at the stern. Furthermore, the hull of the boat is painted to represent the scales on a dragon, with the paddles representing the dragon’s claws. Effective paddling technique in a dragon boat requires the blade to be horizontal in the water whilst having a fast backward pull motion in synchronization with all team members (Unruh & Elvin, 2004). Every year thousands of dragon boat festivals are held worldwide sharing a common purpose: “Hosting dragon boat races is thought to bring health, happiness, and prosperity, as well as offer protection for the unfriendly spirits of the sea” (Barker, 1996 p 5.).

Breast cancer survivors' participation in dragon boating began at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada in 1996 (McKenzie, 1998). Dr. Don McKenzie, a sports medicine doctor, challenged the notion that breast cancer survivors should refrain from rigorous upper-body activity for fear of developing lymphedema. McKenzie developed "Abreast in a Boat", a breast cancer survivor dragon boat team that engaged in physical activity for three months. At the end of the third month, results demonstrated that breast cancer survivors did not have an increased risk for lymphedema from physical activity. Furthermore, the women reported that dragon boating was a fun and supportive environment for them to be active and spread breast cancer awareness (McKenzie, 1998).

Since then, dragon boating has become popularized, and scholars have shown an increased interest in understanding more about the sport and breast cancer survivors' experiences in it. The International Breast Cancer Paddler's Commission (2013) reported that there are now 132 registered breast cancer survivor dragon boat teams in the world. As a result the breast cancer literature has also subsequently developed, showing many physiological and psychological benefits associated with dragon boating, including decreased fatigue and depression, and improvements in body image, self-esteem, and quality of life (Schmitz, 2011). While many quantitative studies have reported numerous physiological and psychological outcomes (Brunet et al., 2011; McDonough et al., 2008; Pinto & Maruyama, 1999; Schmitz, 2011), qualitative studies have focused more on constructs such as joy, support, cohesion, and camaraderie that are experienced in dragon boating (Harris, 2012; McDonough et al., 2008).

In Mitchell and Nielsen's (2002) dragon boat study, camaraderie, which they described as a shared breast cancer experience, social support, common bond, and sense of belonging, was a common theme for breast cancer survivors. Camaraderie is important to breast cancer survivors participating in dragon boating because it provides a social support system that results in the sharing of a common goal and a moving on with life after breast cancer (McDonough et al., 2011; Sabiston et al., 2007). Additionally, dragon boating allows breast cancer survivors the opportunity to be involved in a comfortable and supportive environment, regardless of their changes and experiences with breast cancer (McDonough et al., 2008; Sabiston et al., 2007). These findings are similar to my own research on women's experiences training together for the CIBC Run

for the Cure 5k (Study 1), in which camaraderie represented the shared experience of survivorship helping women to accept their bodies and focus on their physical capabilities to create an overall positive body image experience. In particular, the women expressed the importance of camaraderie and how it created a positive environment for them to continue participation in endurance sports associated with breast cancer, feel proud of their bodies, and help them move beyond their breast cancer experiences.

### **3.1.2 Theoretical Framework**

Although there is not a clear theoretical model of camaraderie for me to use to guide my research, camaraderie seems to have at least some overlap with constructs like social support and cohesion, both of which have well-developed theoretical frameworks to borrow from. In the breast cancer literature, social support is often included in the description of camaraderie (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; McDonough et al., 2008; McDonough et al., 2011; Sabiston, et al., 2007; Unruh & Elvin, 2004). However, even if not necessarily named, aspects of cohesion are also evident in descriptions of camaraderie. For example, Mitchell and Nielsen's (2002) description of camaraderie specifically reflects aspects of cohesion through a focus on a sense of belonging and common bond. Hence, I am using social support and cohesion frameworks to guide my work. The following paragraphs will provide an overview of models of social support and cohesion.

Cobb (1976) defined social support as “information leading the subject to believe that he is cared for and loved, esteemed, and a member of a network of mutual obligations” (p.300). Two types of social support are now commonly recognized: received and perceived (Cohen, Underwood, & Gottlieb, 2000). Received support refers to the extent of support that is actually received and relies on past events; perceived support refers to the perception of support that is considered accessible (Cohen et al., 2000). Cohen and colleagues (2000) stated that an individual's perception of social support is more important than the support that is received, a result supported across many studies on perceived support (Cohen et al., 2000; Lakey & Cohen, 2000; Wills & Shinar, 2000). The model of social provisions is a theoretical framework specifically focused on perceived social support (Wills & Shinar, 2000).



Weiss's (1974) model of social provisions describes six provisions that are acquired from social relationships: attachment (emotional closeness), guidance (advice and information), social integration (common beliefs and interests), reassurance of worth (recognition of competence and value), reliable alliance (tangible assistance), and opportunity for nurturance (sense of belonging). The model of social provisions was selected as a guiding theoretical framework for the present study for two reasons. First, the dimensions in the model of social provisions have been clearly demonstrated in the breast cancer literature. For example, Holland and Holahan (2003) used the model of social provisions in a population of 56 breast cancer survivors. They found that the provisions of attachment, reassurance of worth, social integration, and guidance in particular were important to women experiencing breast cancer. The women in their study reported that having close relationships to family, friends, and other breast cancer survivors helped them come to terms with feelings of isolation and alienation. More specifically, greater attachment, reassurance of worth, social integration, and guidance resulted in higher levels of perceived social support for the women, which itself led to increased psychological well-being and health behaviours.

The second reason for using the model of social provisions in my research is that the model has previously been used in exercise settings. For example, Duncan et al. (1993) conducted a study on the dimensions of social provisions and adherence to an exercise program among middle-aged adults. Findings showed that individual's reassurance of one's self-worth and guidance are important provisions in their adherence to an exercise program. As another example, Courneya and McAuley (1995a, 1995b) conducted two studies on middle-aged adults showing that exercise adherence was increased by higher perceptions of social support. Furthermore, they found that the provisions of attachment, opportunity for nurturance, and reassurance of self-worth were positively related to exercise adherence.

Researchers have shown that cohesion is also an important group factor in exercise and sport settings (Carron, et al., 1988; Duncan, Duncan, & McAuley, 1993). Cohesion, a term used in sport psychology, is considered to be one of the fundamental properties of groups and is defined as "a dynamic process which is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental

objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs” (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1985, p.213). Carron and colleagues (1985) created a conceptual model for cohesion consisting of two distinctions: individual attraction and group integration. Individual Attraction (ATG) refers to an individual’s reasons for why they are attracted to the group. Group integration (GI) is the individual’s perceptions of the group as a team. Carron et al. (1985) suggested that the model be further divided into two orientations: task cohesion and social cohesion. Task cohesion is oriented around aims and goals of the group, which as an example could entail the shared task to win first place in a race. Social cohesion takes into account the social aspects of a group. For instance, a team may have social gatherings after every big competition to celebrate. As a result, there are four dimensions in the cohesion model: Individual Attractions to the Group-Task (ATG-T), Individual Attractions to the Group-Social (ATG-S), Group Integration-Task (GI-T), and Group Integration-Social (GI-S). ATG-T consists of the individual’s feelings toward the team’s goals/objectives, whereas ATG-S refers to the individual’s feeling about the team’s social relationships. GI-T consists of the intimacy and bonding within the team on their goals and objectives, and GI-S refers to the team’s ability to remain close and bond together as a development of social relationships. Altogether, cohesion is the group’s perception of sticking together as team, which represents well the sense of belonging and togetherness that is often described as camaraderie.

Further supporting the inclusion of cohesion as a theoretical framework in my work, Culos-Reed and colleagues (2005) found dragon boating to be a cohesive environment for breast cancer survivors to experience social support. This was in part because the breast cancer survivors experienced a sense of belonging and common bond from interacting with other breast cancer survivors on the team. It appears the more cohesion that exists within a team, the more likely the team members will be able to perceive types of social support. Midtgaard, Rorth, Stelter, and Adamsen (2006) have also explored cohesion and quality of life in cancer patients. Fifty-five cancer patients attended a six week exercise program that consisted of resistance training and aerobics. Findings showed that cohesion developed from the participants’ motives to join the group (e.g., improve physical fitness and health), a sense of belonging with other cancer patients, and togetherness. Midtgaard and colleagues (2006) suggested that cohesion

should be further explored to understand physical activity and quality of life in the cancer population.

Since camaraderie has been a prominent finding in the breast cancer literature (McDonough et al., 2011; Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Unruh & Elvin, 2004), I chose to conduct a study on camaraderie instead of social support and cohesion for several reasons. First, camaraderie is a unique construct that seemingly consists of social support and cohesion combined together to create a shared experience between breast cancer survivors that includes emotional and informational support, a sense of belonging, and togetherness. According to the breast cancer literature, social support is the shared interest and the emotional and informational support in the environment of breast cancer dragon boat teams (McDonough et al., 2008; McDonough, et al., 2011; Sabiston et al., 2007). Cohesion has been described as a sense of belonging and togetherness that is shared in breast cancer survivor dragon boat teams (Culos-Reed et al., 2005). And based on the descriptions of camaraderie in the literature (McDonough et al., 2011; Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Unruh & Elvin, 2004), social support and cohesion collaboratively form the components of camaraderie. Unfortunately, and further supporting the need for my research, there is no clear definition of camaraderie; therefore, models for social support and cohesion were integrated together and used as a proxy for camaraderie.

Second, camaraderie is a term that has been used in the breast cancer literature, as well as in Study 1 of my dissertation, resulting from the language used by research participants; hence, I wanted to be consistent with the terminology in the literature as well as with language used by breast cancer survivors themselves. Mitchell and Nielsen (2002), McDonough et al. (2008), McDonough et al. (2011), and Unruh and Elvin (2004) have all used the term camaraderie frequently in their studies on breast cancer survivors.

Third, the model of social provisions and cohesion model have both been used in previous breast cancer and dragon boat studies (Culos-Reed et al., 2005; Holland & Holahan, 2003). These previous studies demonstrate that the model of social provisions and cohesion are appropriate frameworks for breast cancer research.

### **3.1.3 Statement of Purpose**

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the camaraderie narratives of breast cancer survivors in a season of dragon boating. Although the model of social provisions and cohesion has been used in studies with breast cancer survivors, no research to date has explored the camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in dragon boating. Given that the focus of this study was on camaraderie, it was critical that the theoretical frameworks align with this focus.

## **3.2 Methodology**

### **3.2.1 Narrative**

Recently, the field of sport and exercise psychology has given more attention to narrative research (Smith, 2010). As humans we are storytellers by nature, and we organize our experiences into stories that provide meaning to our lives (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a; Sparkes & Smith, 2011). Narrative can be considered “studying people’s stories as they unfold over time” (Smith, 2010 p.87). There are several different types of narratives (Creswell, 2009), however for the purpose of this research, I chose collective narratives. Collective narratives are defined as shared stories that involve collaboration from multiple perspectives, and thus a collective act of building narratives and sharing identity (Bruner, 1999). Collective narratives are common in areas that focus on significant hardships and traumatic life events (e.g., holocaust survivors) (Bruner, 1999; Schiff & Noy, 2006). There are three main reasons why collective narrative was chosen for this study.

First, collective narrative focuses on the multiple perspectives held by individuals as they create their narrative. A breast cancer survivor dragon boat team usually consists of 25+ team members, is dynamic, and is expected to have many different interpretations and meanings of camaraderie among participants. While each woman’s voice is important, their collective voices can be used represent their camaraderie experiences as a team. Furthermore, it is important to hear their voices as a team in an attempt to best capture the dynamics, transitions, meanings, and interpretations of their camaraderie experiences.

Second, a key component of collective narratives are the shared identity that a group generates through their actions and social constructions (Bruner, 1999;

Papadopoulos, 1999). In the case of my study, the women's shared identity reflects both their breast cancer experiences and participation on a dragon boat team. The concept of shared identity has been shown to be an essential and valuable factor as to why breast cancer survivors often participate on a dragon boat team (McDonough et al., 2011; Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Unruh & Elvin, 2004). According to Mitchell and Nielsen (2002), breast cancer survivors feel comfortable and at ease with other survivors and are able to share their experiences, including information about their cancer diagnosis. Furthermore, participation in dragon boating offers breast cancer survivors an opportunity to be physically active, improve health and well-being, and spread breast cancer awareness (Mitchell, et al., 2007; Parry, 2007).

Third, there is no existing literature, to my knowledge, that portrays breast cancer survivors' experiences in the form of a collective narrative. For my research, I decided to use the term "camaraderie narratives" to represent the collective experiences of breast cancer survivors in a season of dragon boating. There are several reasons why I chose to use the term camaraderie narratives<sup>4</sup>. First, the term camaraderie is frequently used in the breast cancer literature. For example, Mitchell and Nielsen (2002) identified camaraderie as one of the key themes for breast cancer survivors in the context of dragon boating, which is consistent with the results of my Study 1 in which camaraderie was one of the themes of women's participation in the Run for the Cure 5k. Second, the focus of my research in Study 2 is specifically on camaraderie, so focusing specifically on a camaraderie narratives allowed me to best answer research questions related to breast cancer survivors' camaraderie experiences throughout a season of dragon boating. The goal of my camaraderie narratives was to have the women's collective stories come alive so that the reader could experience a sense of the women's camaraderie. Third, I wanted to select a narrative method that would contribute to the literature, not only in content, but through an innovative approach to represent the findings. Smith (2010) stated that narrative research should expand the representation of findings to improve people lives and lead to the growth of qualitative research in sport and exercise psychology. Thus, for the purpose of this study, camaraderie narratives was chosen as the best approach that

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<sup>4</sup> Collective narratives will be referred to as camaraderie narratives through out the remainder of the dissertation.

captured the heart of the breast cancer survivors' camaraderie experiences in a season of dragon boating. Ultimately, it is through narratives that we are able to draw from other's experiences to form meaning and interpretation (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b), making it an ideal approach for my research.

### 3.2.2 Participants

Following approval from the University Behavioural Ethics Board (see Appendix G)<sup>5</sup>, participants were purposefully sampled from a local dragon boat team. Participants ranged from 46 to 71 years of age ( $M = 61$ ), were predominately Caucasian, and middle to upper socioeconomic status. Eleven of the women were married, two were divorced, and three were widowed. Participants underwent treatments for breast cancer including mastectomy, reconstruction, and lymph node removal, chemotherapy, and radiation. All participants stated that they had past sport experiences (e.g., track, basketball, volleyball, swimming, and softball) and exercise experiences (e.g., aerobic classes and weight training). Women from the dragon boat team were contacted at the beginning of pre-season dragon boat practices, and the entire dragon boat team consisting of 30 women was given an opportunity to participate in this study. The study was explained to members of the team and consent forms (see Appendix J) were distributed to the women who expressed potential interest. As a result of this process, my study consisted of 16 women with a core group of 11 women. The core group actively participated in all three focus groups and creative practices activities throughout the remainder of the study. Ivanhoff and Hultberg (2006) suggested that a core group of participants “ensures that the research meets its needs” (p. 126). The reason for having additional participants beyond the core group at various points was that in an attempt to write a complete camaraderie narrative, I wanted to have as many of the women on the team participate as possible. I also wanted to ensure that the women’s camaraderie experiences were the most adequate representation possible of their breast cancer dragon boat team as a collective. To be accommodating to their interests and availability, I explained that they could participate in as many or as little activities that were offered.

To justify the size of my core group, several qualitative studies in the breast cancer literature interviewed 5 to 10 women about their experiences with breast cancer

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<sup>5</sup> Appendix H and Appendix I consist of additional ethics approvals for focus group interviews and creative practice activity. The focus group interview and activity guides were constructed as the process of the study unfolded and were submitted to ethics one month prior to the actual focus group interviews and creative practice activities.

(Allen, Savadatti, & Levy, 2009; Ashing-Giwa, Padilla, Tejero, Kraemer, & Wright et al., 2004; Ferrell, Grant, Funk, Otis-Green, & Garcia, 1998). Hence, the number of participants in the core group in my research is similar to previous research. Furthermore, having more participants allows for a more diverse representation (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

### **3.2.3 Process of Study**

My previously established relationships and informal conversations with participants were important processes that enabled me to successfully address my research questions. Hence, I introduce both processes below prior to providing detail on my formal methods of data collection, which included focus group interviews, participant journaling, creative practices, and field notes.

#### **3.2.3.1 Established Relationship with Participants**

My previously established relationships with participants resulted from me becoming a coach for a local breast cancer survivor dragon boat team in February, 2012. I had previously recruited three women from the team to participate in Study 1<sup>6</sup>, and based on my experience, it seemed like the ideal team to recruit from for Study 2. The biggest benefit of this approach is that an effective rapport had already been established between me and the majority of the women. However, while established relationships with the participants were critical, subsequent informal conversations have also informed the procedure and methods of my research.

#### **3.2.3.2 Informal Conversations**

Marshall and Rossman (2011) stated that informal conversations occur “on the spot and are spontaneous and serendipitous” (p. 144). They represent causal conversations that the researcher has with the participants she is observing. Cohen and Crabtree (2006) suggested that informal conversations foster rapport building and help to create an understanding of the setting in which the study takes place. My informal conversations with participants took place during both pre-season and in-season dragon

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<sup>6</sup> Two of the women from Study 1 also participated in Study 2.



boat team practices, as well as at competition festivals. These conversations typically occurred while I coached the women on fitness, technical skills, and endurance. During practices and festivals, the conversations ranged from fitness and health topics, to dragon boating, body image, clothing, news, and other personal experiences in their lives. Key points from the informal conversations were recorded by me in the form of field notes. These field notes ultimately added to my depth of understanding and supplemented the other forms data collection.

### **3.2.4 Data Collection**

#### **3.2.4.1 Focus Group Interviews**

Interviews are conducted to gain experiences and a sense of knowledge through participants' stories (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The specific form of interview I used in my study was focus group (Kitzinger, 1995). More specifically I had three semi-structured focus group interviews to explore the camaraderie experiences of the women during pre-season training (beginning of March until the end of May, 2013) and throughout the official dragon boat season (end May until beginning of August, 2013).

Focus group interviews were chosen as a principle method of data collection for three primary reasons. First, as Kitzinger (1995) stated, focus group interviews promote a non-threatening environment in which to explore participants' experiences. Since I had a previously established relationship with participants, as well as my observations of their conversations and experiences together, I knew that the women were most likely already comfortable talking to their teammates and me about their experiences in a group setting. Second, focus group interviews have been successfully used previously as a research method in studies with breast cancer survivors. Ferrell, Grant, Funk, Otis-Green, and Garcia (1998) showed that focus groups are important to breast cancer survivor research because they allow for an opportunity for women to share their experiences with other women, as well as provide critical information for future research. Furthermore, Ferrell et al. (1998) suggested that future research should use focus groups as a method for breast cancer survivors because they provide an opportunity for women to network and engage in question-and-answer sessions about their breast cancer experiences. Third, despite Ferrell et al.'s (1998) recommendation, there is surprisingly little research on breast

cancer survivors and physical activity that specifically uses focus groups as a main method of data collection. Previous research on breast cancer survivors and dragon boating specifically has typically explored breast cancer survivor's experiences using individual interviews. However, Allen, Savadatti, and Levy (2009) stated that there are the following advantages of conducting focus groups in studies with breast cancer survivors: (1) focus group interviews can allow a variety of perspectives and opinions to be shared about breast cancer experiences, (2) the environment of the focus group interviews will allow participants to have freedom to discuss experiences that may lead to the emergence of themes, and (3) the focus group interviews may allow themes to emerge quicker than via individual interviews.

The three semi-structured face-to-face focus group interview guides (see Appendix L and Appendix M) were developed, focusing on broad to more specific questions that allowed for flexibility to adapt to the participants' responses and follow the storyline of their perspectives and experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). An example interview question was "*What does the term 'camaraderie' mean to you all as breast cancer survivors?*" There are six dimensions of the model of social provisions (Weiss, 1974): attachment (emotional closeness), guidance (advice and information), social integration (common beliefs and interests), reassurance of worth (recognition of competence and value), reliable alliance, (tangible assistance), and opportunity for nurturance (sense of belonging) and four components of cohesion: Individual Attractions to the Groups-Task (ATG-T) and Group Integration-Task (GI-T), Attractions to the Groups-Social (ATG-S) and Group Integration-Social (GI-S) that were also used as part of the development of the interview guides to better understand the women's camaraderie experiences during the focus group interviews. I developed the interview guides by reflecting on the wording in the Social Provisions scale (SPS; Cutrona & Russell, 1987) and the Group Environmental Questionnaire (GEQ; Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1985). Key words from SPS consisted of shared interest and experiences and guidance; GEQ included a sense of belonging and togetherness. However, after careful consideration, I decided not to use key words from SPS and GEQ (e.g., shared interest and sense of belonging) to frame the interview questions since the women may have felt prompted to use key words that may not be appropriate in their camaraderie experiences.

Nonetheless, I decided to use camaraderie and social support as the key words in the interview questions (i.e. “*How is camaraderie different from social support?*”) to allow the women the opportunity to express wording of their choice to represent their camaraderie experiences. Following the structure of the interview guides, the approximate length of time to complete the interviews was taken into consideration.

Each focus group interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, and an electronic audio-recording device was utilized during the interviews. The approximate time to conduct interviews was consistent with previous research conducted on breast cancer survivors and using focus groups, which has previously shown that approximately 1 to 2 hours is sufficient time to collect necessary data (e.g., Allen et al., 2009; Wilson, Andersen, & Meischke, 2000).

The benefits of having interviews administered, albeit one-on-one, at various time points of a dragon boat season (e.g., pre-, during, and post-) were demonstrated in McDonough et al.’s (2008) study. However, conducting focus group interviews at the various time points was particularly important to my study because dragon boating consists of transitions from pre-season training (March-May) to, and throughout, the official dragon boat season (June-August). Transitions in sports generally consist of things like interpersonal relationships, team roles, group norms, and communication (Williams, 2006). Conducting interviews at various time points allowed me to focus on these transitions that occurred in dragon boating from pre-season training to the official dragon boat season (Kleinert, Ohlert, Carron, Eys, Feltz, et al., 2012).

Additionally, prolonged engagement allowed me to further build trust and rapport with the women as they became more familiar with me as the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, my approach is somewhat similar to Burke and Sabiston (2010) who used prolonged engagement and persistent observation when exploring the subjective well-being of breast cancer survivors during a nine-day climb up Mt. Kilimanjaro. By immersing myself in dragon boating, I became more familiar with the context and observed the women interacting with each other in different contexts (i.e., practices and festivals) and various time points (i.e., days and months) (Krefting, 1991). Thus, I was able to better understand the group dynamics (i.e. interpersonal relationships, team roles, group norms, and communication) that occurred during a dragon boat season

from prolonged time in the field. After deciding the time points of the focus group interviews, the first focus group interview was conducted four weeks after the start of dragon boat season (March, 2013).

The goal of the first focus group (April, 2013) was to: (a) further build rapport, (b) provide participants with an opportunity to share their background in sports and physical activity, (c) discuss their camaraderie experiences, (d) provide context for the second focus group, and (e) discuss creative practice activities. Furthermore, the first interview was an opportunity for participants and I to collaborate on potential creative practices and the proposed timeline of the activities for the study. The second focus group interview occurred two weeks after the official dragon boat season began (June, 2013). The goal of the second focus group interview was to provide an opportunity for the women to conduct a creative practice activity of their choosing, as well as for me to record discussions that occurred during the activity. Hence, the second focus group interview was semi-formal, and during the activity I frequently asked participants questions regarding the meaning and interpretations about the object of the activity. The third focus group interview (July, 2013) was completed 10 days following the final dragon boat competition of the competitive season. The goal of the third focus group interview was to: (a) introduce to the women an overview of the themes resulting from the first two focus groups and provide them an opportunity to discuss and make changes to the themes, (b) identify a specific definition of camaraderie based on the women's experiences throughout the dragon boat season, and (c) provide the participants with the opportunity to make additional comments.

#### **3.2.4.2 Creative Practices**

Janesick (2007) stated that the use of creative practices in qualitative research expands the possibilities of using imagination during the natural process of experiences and events. Creating art also has the ability to assist individuals when conveying their thoughts, feelings, and representing their own experiences (Ponto et al., 2003). Additionally, Stuckey and Nobel (2010) stated that the process of creating art guides individuals, such as those with cancer, when sharing experiences that are hard to express in words. As a result, creative practice was chosen as a method for this study to provide

the women an opportunity to portray their camaraderie experiences in a visual form of their choice.

During the first focus group interview, the women were asked to start thinking of potential creative practice activities and were provided a few weeks to decide on their specific choice of creative practice activity. The women ended up selecting a hat-making creative practice activity, which they thought had the most potential to represent their camaraderie experiences as a team. To complete the activity, the women gathered (June, 2013) at one of the woman's houses. One of the women offered to provide the hat, while others brought art and craft supplies to decorate the hat. Prior to the start of the activity, I discussed with the women that they had the flexibility to decorate the hat however they liked as long as they did it as a team and the hat represented their camaraderie experiences. The hat-making activity took approximately two hours, during which the hat was adorned with various materials, objects, and colours. An electronic audio-recording device was utilized during the hat making creative practice activity to record any conversations that occurred among the women. During the activity, I observed the women, took notes, and asked questions when appropriate, so that I was not a distraction to the women while making the hat. I frequently asked the women to describe their choices related to certain materials and colours used to make the hat. Furthermore, once the hat was completed, I asked the women to describe what the hat meant to them and how it represented their camaraderie experiences as a team.



**Figure 9. (Camaraderie Hat)**

### 3.2.4.3 Field Notes

Field notes are recorded from observation and are meant to be both detailed and nonjudgmental descriptions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). As a qualitative researcher, the field notes were considered by me to be vital to the research process and one of the main methods of data collection, especially because of the extensive time I spent in the field<sup>7</sup>. My field notes were in the form of journal entries, and they included the date along with a description of the training program for that day, what the participants actually did in terms of the workout, details from informal conversations, and any other observations I made that were deemed noteworthy. Field notes were recorded in my notebook during and after practices, and following two dragon boat festivals. My field notes were subsequently typed in a Word document, organized, and labeled accordingly. Field notes are typically used as a data source to provide researchers with background information, events, and details that may go unnoticed by the researcher (Wolfinger, 2002). In this study, I used field notes to document background information, events, and details that occurred at dragon boat practices, festivals, focus group interviews, and creative practice activities that I may have forgotten if I had not documented the information and occurrences. The documentation of background information, events, and details allowed me to reflect on practices, festivals, interviews, and creative practices that resonate with my background knowledge to produce the identification of the settings and events that are written in the women's camaraderie narratives. The following example of field notes were chosen since they highlighted some of the best details, observations, and conversations that occurred during the six months I spent collecting data with the women. The selected entries represented different points of the study and provided some of the most memorable moments and experiences that occurred between the women and I throughout the six months of dragon boating. The field notes entries have also been edited for clarity. Here are examples of entries in my field notes from different points during the season:

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<sup>7</sup> The possibility of participant journaling was discussed, but the women were not interested in journaling as a data collection method.

*February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2013*

*"I went to dragon boat practice tonight for the first time this season. It felt great to be back and see the women. Tonight, there were 6 new members that came to practice, and I had the opportunity to meet them; they were all very nice. At the beginning of practice, I introduced myself to the new women and then explained to the entire team how we changed the circuit training to high intensity interval training. High intensity interval training will be challenging but good for the women. Shortly after, I led a dynamic warm-up and the women went over to the table to find their nametags. Prior to practice, the nametags were mixed up in a bag and carefully arranged to pair each woman with a partner. After finding their partners, the women went to a station to get started. The structure of the training for each woman was to perform each exercise for one minute and then rest one minute at each station. When each woman was resting, her partner was completing the exercise. After the partners completed the station, they followed the order of the stations that were numbered with signs. Tonight, there were a total of 12 stations for the women to complete. Overall, the women seemed to enjoy the changes to the program. It felt really great to be reunited with the women again, and it feels like just yesterday that we had our last practice of the season. Time flies when you are having fun!"*

*April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013*

*"Tonight, only 11 women showed up for practice. Prior to training today, the women and I talked about the dragon boat festivals that we would be participating in this year. With the official dragon boat season rapidly approaching, we will only have 4 to 6 weeks to prepare for competition by the time we get on the water at the end of May. After talking about our time frame for competition, it was time to get to work. All the women put in a lot of hard work and effort tonight; they should be proud of themselves. Tonight was very busy; I had very little time to talk to the women. I spent most a significant amount of time explaining and correcting technique. Toward the end of practice, I walked around writing in my notebook as usual when one of the women said to me, "We*

*always see you writing in your notebook. Is that your naughty and nice list?"*  
*Jokingly, I said yes! Then I told the women that I record notes and conversations that we have at practices for my dissertation. They said ok, but I am still convinced that they think it is a naughty and nice list as they threatened to take my notebook away from me and read what I wrote. Practice was certainly full of hard work and laughter tonight".*

*June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2013*

*"Tonight, 15 people came to practice. It was a beautiful evening to be out on the water paddling. At the beginning of practice, I led a quick dynamic warm-up on land and arranged everyone into seating assignments. First, we practiced "paddles up" since the women need to work on quick and snappy movements. Second, we practiced our starts with 6-12-3-2-1 as our count and they felt great! The women were excited about their performance and the adrenaline rush. Third, we practiced our proper paddling technique A-frame since some of the women are still struggling with form. Overall, I thought the women did well tonight, considering this was our third practice in the water. I definitely worked the women hard tonight, as there was a lot less talking and a lot more working getting done. However, when the women were talking, they were motivating and encouraging each other to push until the end. The women were saying that they are all tired, but they are all in this together. Even though this was our third practice, the new women are adjusting to paddling quite well especially with the support and encouragement of the more experienced paddlers. At the end of practice, I reminded the women that we are a month away from our first race of the season, so we need to be working hard since we only have 8 practices left!*

*July 8th, 2013*

*"The dragon boat festival brings lots of joy, hope, fun, and excitement to all paddlers because of the commonality in the sport and the purpose of each team to do their best and have fun. Just being at these festivals provides feelings of warmth and joy as the environment is very welcoming to all dragon boat teams".*



### **3.3 Data Analysis**

The data analysis approach I used was narrative analysis. Smith and Sparkes (2012) described narrative analysis as a data analysis strategy that allows a researcher to interpret and represent data in the form of a story. Smith and Sparkes (2012) suggested the following six steps for a holistic analysis of content, which is a key aspect of narrative analysis: First, I read through the interviews and listened to the recorded data repeatedly until immersion occurred. The process of immersion occurs when a pattern emerges from reading the data repeatedly. Second, I wrote my first impressions of the pattern of the story, the contradictions, and the descriptions on a blank piece of paper. Third, I read the transcripts repeatedly and used colored note pads to identify themes. Fourth, I interpreted the themes by reading each of the themes separately and repetitively, and creating a report that listed each theme. At this point in the data analysis process, I continued to read over the themes numerous times as I looked at each theme separately and spent time reflecting on the meaning of each theme, the underlying assumptions, and the narrative across the themes. I then proceeded to take several pieces of paper and list each theme, recording a summary of the interpretation for all five themes. Fifth, I tracked where the theme appeared, the main themes, the sub-themes, the characters, and the crossover between themes. More specifically, I looked at where each main theme and sub-theme occurred, the crossover between themes, and the context for each one. Sixth, I continued to write and rewrite the stories. At this step, I wrote and rewrote the stories with the goal to write articulate and clear stories of the themes, which continued until the stories were completed in a form of the camaraderie narratives shown below.

### **3.4 Results**

#### **3.4.1 Organization of Results**

Each woman shared her experiences as a member of the dragon boat team with me throughout the process of data collection, and I have chosen to present their collective experiences in the form of camaraderie narrative. The camaraderie narrative will be told from a first person perspective, meant to represent the collective stories and voices of all the women that participated in this study. Collective stories have been shown to generate new knowledge that is found in the stories told by participants (Bruner, 1999). In my case, the women created the knowledge of their camaraderie experiences, through stories told via focus group interviews, creative practices, and informal conversations. I believe that camaraderie narratives are the best approach to share with the reader details of each the women's stories, describe how the women's stories related to each other, and show the transitions that occurred throughout the course of the dragon boat season.

Hence, each chapter in the Results section will focus specifically on one of the five themes that emerged in my study. The title of each chapter is labeled using dragon boat terminology, intended as a metaphor of women's experiences, chosen by the participants. The five themes are *Attention please*, *Paddles Up*, *Take it away*, *Hold the boat*, and *Reach*.

#### **3.4.2 Prologue**

The character that I have created for the camaraderie narratives is meant to represent the collective voices of the women in my study. I chose to create a fictional character so that the voices of the women would be heard as equals, while allowing the women's stories to still be read as non-fiction. I used the collective voices of the women in this study to guide the creation of the character represented in the stories. I took women's stories, as recorded in my field notes, focus group interviews, and personal experiences, and used them to create a structure as how to introduce the character and her background information. Furthermore, I also used elements in Tocher's (2002) book *How to Ride a Dragon* to guide descriptions of characters and ways to integrate details

and background information into the context of the plot. So without further ado, I introduce you to Judy.

### **3.4.3 Character Description**

My breast cancer diagnosis came as a complete and utter shock to me in the summer of 2009. Here I was, a 55 year old woman living a fulfilled life, and then suddenly I was in my doctor's office pacing back and forth waiting for the doctor to tell me the test results. My husband, sitting in a chair in the corner, was following me with worried eyes. He said, "I wish you would sit down". I could hear the concern in his voice.

Smiling sadly at him I said, "I can't sit down, my fate awaits me today".

I continued pacing nervously when I heard the knob of the door turn. In walked Dr. Parker. He asked me to have a seat and said, "Judy, we have the results of the biopsy, and it appears that we have found cancer in both breasts".

Almost immediately, I felt as though death was staring me in the face.

Not long after receiving the news, I underwent surgery for a bilateral mastectomy and completed chemotherapy treatments. During chemo, I spent most of my time reading, sleeping, and going for walks. And before I knew it, the days and months had flown by and my chemo treatment was complete. I was surprised that it took me so long to gain back the strength and energy I had before this nightmare all started. My mood and energy levels fluctuated more than they ever had before, as did my good and bad days.

One morning, when I was having a particularly good day, I saw an article about breast cancer survivors forming a dragon boat team. It sparked my interest as I read about the benefits of physical activity and breast cancer. After reading, I put the article down and went over to the computer, searching for more information about breast cancer dragon boat teams. The first thing I came across was a breast cancer team site. In the photos, the women were dazzling in pink, and they looked like they were having a lot of fun. I spent a few minutes looking at team photos and reading about the team. I was astonished by how much other information was on the internet about dragon boating! I

visited a few other breast cancer teams' websites, only to find that as I continued to search dragon boating was becoming more and more appealing to me.

I began to wonder if there was a local breast cancer team near to where I lived. I quickly searched "Bexley breast cancer dragon boat team". And sure enough, a link came up for a local team. I found myself so excited that I could not have clicked on it fast enough. As a result, I spent the next hour scoping out everything I could about the team, and wrote down their contact information. I decided my best option was to e-mail the team, after which I awaited a reply.

Later that evening, there was a response in my inbox from the dragon boat team manager, which I opened with eager anticipation. She thanked me for my interest and asked if we could meet to talk about the team. I responded immediately, setting a date to meet together the following week over coffee.

The day of the meeting finally came, and I waited patiently for the team manager at our agreed upon coffee shop. As I sat there, I thought to myself, "I have so many questions. I hope she can answer all of them. Or at least most of them".

A woman walked in, looked around, approached me, and introduced herself as Sally. I shook her hand and said, "Hi. I'm Judy. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me".

We both ordered our coffees and were keen to get straight down to business. I wanted to know about the team, how and when they train, the cost, and their history; as well as get answers to a hundred other questions. Sally sat patiently, for an hour and half, and answered every question on my list. We even managed to enjoy a few laughs as we chatted.

Sally had many years of boating experience on the breast cancer team, and she seemed more than happy to talk with me about everything. She shared funny stories, talked about the support network, and, most of all, she emphasized the amount of fun the members on the team had.

However, she also discussed the important role that camaraderie played among team members. Even her use of the term 'camaraderie', stood out for me. I took a moment and reflected back on the massive amount of reading I had done over the past

week on breast cancer and dragon boating. And the word ‘camaraderie’ was quite common among in my readings. I politely waited for Sally to finish her current story, and I asked her what she actually means by the term ‘camaraderie’, especially in the context of a dragon boat team. She smiled, and said, “Judy, that’s an excellent question. I think for most of us the term ‘camaraderie’ in dragon boating represents the fellowship, teamwork, and support that’s shared between us as breast cancer survivors. I think that it’s a perfect term to describe our experiences as members of the team, and I can’t imaging dragon boating being as successful as it is without it”.

She continued to tell me many stories about her own camaraderie experiences through dragon boating, making me excited to try dragon boating for myself.

Given that it was April, and the team was just getting ready to end their pre-season training for summer dragon boating, Sally assured me that I could join within a few weeks so that I could be there when the team started practicing in the boat. She provided me with some additional team information, such as where the boathouse was located and the season schedule. We hugged and I thanked her for this wonderful opportunity.

I spent the rest of the day ecstatic; I was going to be a paddler on a breast cancer survivor dragon boat team! I was going to be physically active and make friends with other women that shared a similar experience to me-- this was unbelievable and more than I had hoped for prior to meeting with Sally. I found myself not being able to stop smiling the remainder of the day.

Two weeks passed, and May finally came around. It was time to start dragon boating.

### 3.4.4 Themes

#### *Attention please*

To our team, dragon boating is exciting and lots of fun. When I first heard about dragon boating, it was because I read about the breast cancer survivor team in Springhollow. You can only imagine my excitement when I saw that we also had a dragon boating team here.

As soon as I arrived to try dragon boating out for the first time I was given a paddle and a lifejacket. But I had no clue what I was doing. Not particularly helping matters, the wood paddle looked totally worn out. The only thing I could think of saying was, “How do you hold this thing?”

Several of the women overheard me; they simply laughed, recognizing that I was clearly new. With the ice broken, I smiled and, with their help, climbed into a display dragon boat perched on a little hill next to the boathouse and sat down on the wooden seat. Soon thereafter, while we were still on land, a few of the “veterans” explained how to paddle. After lots of feedback and correction on my form, I was asked to line up as the coach was calling out her boat seating list. I thought, “This is it. I am getting into the boat for the first time, and I am going paddle!”

We loaded the boat front to back, and then before I knew it we were pushing ourselves away from the dock with our paddles up ready. That first stroke felt magical. The water felt cool and light as it touched my left hand and arm as I moved the paddle through the water. The sun was beaming on my head, and I could feel the warmth. I said to myself, “Note to self, bring hat next time”. Thankfully, though, I had my sunglasses to cover both the sun’s brightness and the water kicking up in my face from the paddler in front of me. We spent about 30 minutes in the boat slowly going through the paddling form before we docked for the day.

When I got out of the boat that first time, I was soaking wet; but the other women seemed unconcerned and gave high fives as we left dock. They even told me that I did a good job for my first time out in the boat. Looking back, the women were patient with me, and even after that one practice I could already say that I went from knowing nothing about dragon boating to knowing something. That something was learning, sort of anyway, how to paddle. But even more importantly, I think I found my calling. I know it

might sound corny, but the old saying that “we are all in the same boat” came into my mind that day after practice. I also remember thinking, “Yep, this sounds like a good fit for me”. Our journey began for us when the official called “Attention Please”.

Being a member on the dragon boat team is like being a part of a sisterhood that no one wants to join. It’s this secret sisterhood for which if you get the exclusive envelope slipped under your door, you’re in. But little did we know that the envelope contained a top-secret code, otherwise known as “the C word”. I wish this envelope were an invitation to sit around a campfire and eat S’mores and sing *Kumbaya*. But with this amazing group of women it’s pretty close. See, when we’re together not a moment goes by when we are not having fun or laughing about something or other.

As a breast cancer survivor dragon boat team, we use humor more and we laugh more, even more so, than some other teams do... because there’s more to laugh about. When we’re in the boat, one of the women will most likely be laughing at the woman that sits behind her, often because she just dumped massive amounts of river water on her lap while paddling. The women’s favorite joke is to say, “It’s a water sport”. It might sound silly, but we laugh every time we hear it. Some of us are splashers, and some of us are paddlers. But I think we’ve never had either an exercise session or paddling session in which we haven’t laughed over something. In fact, we laugh over everything, ranging from the stories told to each other, to the things that people do or say at each practice. Not a day goes by with these women when I am not suffering from a stomachache as a result of laughing so hard.

At the Rockbridge Dragon Boat Festival, right after our first race of the day, we headed back to the team tent to drop off our paddles and life jackets for some downtime before our next race. Meanwhile, a few of the women wandered over to the massage therapy tent to sign up for a free massage. I was organizing my belongings when I heard Anna laughing; I swear you could hear that woman laugh from a mile away. I couldn’t make out what she was laughing about, but I do know that I couldn’t help myself but to break out in laughter even though I didn’t even know what it was about. And it didn’t even matter what it was about. Some of the women on this team are just very funny. What I really appreciate about the women is the craziness, the laughter, and the jokes.

Throughout the dragon boat season from the end of February until the end of August our lives are joined completely. At the end of February, we start pre-season practice at a physical therapy clinic led by our coach and a physical therapist. Over the course of the next three months, we spend countless hours sweating, crying, whining, frowning, sighing, and smiling. In fact, many of us initially joined the team to be physically active, so it's another common thing we share. Our workouts are hard, and frustrating at times, but we all recognize that it's good for us. It helps prevent reoccurrence.

Besides, a little sweat and tears never hurt anyone. There is the odd time when we have someone like Gwen, who seemingly always requests more challenging exercises. But we do know it's good for us, so perhaps there was always both a little frowning and grinning at her.

When we all first started on this journey we did not know what dragon boating was or if we would even like it. But with a team like ours there are so many joyous moments full of love, laughter, and fun. Throughout this experience together we became a team. Our attraction to dragon boating began with a price tag, an expensive one to say the least; but we've gotten the gift of each other, which comes with it lots of laughs and good times. We mean everything to one another.

### *Paddles Up*

Back when we were in Rockbridge, the team was standing around in an area known as marshaling. Don't worry if you're not familiar with it. I actually only first learned about marshaling in Rockbridge. Marshaling, or more specifically "the marshaling area", is the name given to an area by the dock where team members are held until it is their turn to enter into their boat. Usually, teams stand around, talk and sing their team cheers, and/or stand and wait patiently to load the boats. I personally really like our team cheers. They make me smile every time, because it reminds me of the women with whom I train and compete.

At one event we were standing around with the other breast cancer teams when we decided to sing one of our team cheers. It goes:



**We have cancer on the run,  
Who needs hooters for this fun?  
We are paddling down the river,  
Check our speed it will make you quiver.  
Dragon ladies tried and true,  
You will never see us blue!**

Everyone else there clapped and cheered for us as we ended the cheer. The smiles and laughs on other breast cancer survivors' and spectators' faces were countless. Every time we sing our team cheers we stand loud and proud, our eyes glistening with joy, with our hearts and souls open to the warm sounds of the words that we sing. A smile appears on all of our faces each time we sing, knowing that we are showing others our shared love and pride for our team. To us, the words of our team cheers represent who we are as team and show our true team spirit.

According to our team philosophy, everyone has a role; we need each other to paddle. Some may be stronger, bigger, faster; but in the end were all here to say, "I'm with a group of women that are exactly like me". We continually say to each other, "If I can do it, you can do it". For us, it doesn't matter if you wear your prostheses to practice or have had, or are thinking about, reconstruction, because we understand. This team has a common thread that connects us. We are unified as breast cancer survivors and a dragon boat team. Together we conquer and provide hope.

At practices, we can always be heard talking about our scars, side effects of cancer treatment, and the changes to our bodies that result from cancer. In fact, when the latest gossip came out about Angelina Jolie getting a double mastectomy, that's all we talked about. We thought that Angelina should go get some photos taken in a magazine just so we can see what her scars look like. We got reassurance from thinking that at last in some way she looks like us.

The great thing about dragon boating is that there's a place for every body type and body shape in the boat. As a team, we bond together and are able to accept our bodies. At one practice, I was talking to Jill when we overheard some of the other women

say, “Where else can you paddle without boobs? They’re just Christmas Ornaments”. Everyone broke out in laughter. I mean, when you think about it, it’s true. Not to mention how amazing it is that we’re all women with breast cancer; our hormones are all out-of-whack, and yet we still get along. Whatever we are doing seems to be working. But we need to keep the momentum going.

You see, our bond is like a pair of shoes. But not like any pair of shoes. It’s like our favorite pair. If one of us is out shopping or running errands and we see someone from the team, we instantly feel a sense of relief. I guess seeing each other just makes each of us feel comfortable. To us, our team is a very comfortable place, because it is safe and loving. I mean where else can another group of women adjust their boobs in public? Come on. The bond that this team shares has also helped some of us go from the immediate crisis of breast cancer to being a vehicle to help us move on with our lives.

A huge part of moving on with our lives has occurred because of our participation in dragon boating. Dragon boating always leaves us feeling invigorated due to the physical exertion and hard work that is required. This sport may look easy, but it is hard work. We spend countless hours paddling in the boat preparing to race each season. Typically, we race in two dragon boat festivals a year.

At the festival that we have in Bexley, over the past several years we have been the only breast cancer team that participates; which is unfortunate, but what can you do? Our breast cancer team has been participating in the Bexley Dragon Boat Festival, for years, and we race in the women’s division. We have even been known to make a name for ourselves with the festival organizers. We are forever known as the team that likes to move bridges. See, last year we were practicing for the festival and our boat hit the Rosegate Bridge. Luckily everyone was ok. But poor Bridget did lose her paddle downstream.

A year has gone by and we still talk about that day. During one of our team meetings, we decided to make it a team goal this year to not move bridges. Laughter broke out among all the women as we reminisced on that fateful day (and our new goal). We like to call the Bexley Festival ours because, as our coach tells us, the Bexley River is our battlefield and everything we know is in these waters. We spend many hours practicing the starts, middle, and ends to our 500m races there. Every time we practice,

we leave everything we have out on that water. There is no holding back on this team. During festivals, other teams and spectators watching us race do so in awe and amazement. They are amazed at what we can do at our age, perhaps a bit at our wisdom, and at how breast cancer has drawn us together in such a strong bond as we continue to beat the cancer dragon.

Every time we step foot into our boat, we immediately feel this positive aura. I mean, we know we are all breast cancer survivors, but we don't dwell on that fact. We are just a bunch of women with positive energy embracing life to fullest. How can you beat that? Whether we are in the boat or on land, when we are together we are always busy celebrating every little thing that we do. Sure we have some conflicts here and there, but who has time for nitpicking? The little things simply are not important. What is important is the positive energy and environment that we feel and experience as a result of being a woman on our team. It's just like our song: you will never see us blue... our team has just a wonderful sense of belonging. Every time "Paddles Up" is yelled at practice, we extend our arms and together we paddle upstream.

### *Take it away*

We are friends and we are teammates. Many of us knew that we would be friends before we actually we got to know each other. Our friendship is like cardboard cutouts of little people holding hands together. I mean not literally holding hands, but figuratively holding hands. With this particular group, I think friendships develop quicker. Much more quickly than they might if we were just with a "normal" group of people. But what does that even really mean? Sure, some of us say we're not normal; but some say we are. I guess we'll never know the truth. If there even is one.

We "newbies", as we're often called, started pre-seasoning training with the "veterans" at the end of February. And by the time May came around we had our very first practice in the boat. I distinctly remember the first time at the boathouse. All of a sudden I was seeing people that I hadn't even seen before at the physical therapy clinic. I'm not sure why, but I was kind of taken aback. I was thinking, "Who are these people?". But other people who knew them welcomed them back with open arms, which quickly put my mind at ease. It was just another example of how much these women all

care for one another and how easy it is to feel an immediate bond between us as members of this team. Plus, I think we all really enjoy the experience of meeting new people.

The friendships on this team become very intimate very quickly. You see, it is really only during the official dragon boat team season (June-August) that we have an opportunity to travel together. And during those times we socialize for 16 hours at a time... or at least until we get sick of each other... or are on the verge of falling asleep. During the day at the festivals, you can always find us hanging out at our tent or walking around socializing and watching the races. When we're racing we're not just breast cancer survivors; more importantly, we're friends. However, the word "friends" doesn't seem quite large enough to describe how we feel about each other though.

We see each other in some of our happiest moments, as well as some of our saddest. At the flower ceremony in Rockbridge, paddlers from various teams lined up on a bridge to cheer for us as breast cancer survivors when we received our pink roses to celebrate our survivorship. The speakers were blaring "I'm Alive" by Céline Dion, and we could see that there was lots of emotion as it played, not only among all of us, but also among the spectators. There we stood holding onto each other, swaying to the music as it played. The flower ceremonies are always an incredibly emotional experience. We always stand there with our arms around each other, tears running down our faces.

The pink roses represent breast cancer survivors, as well as others whom have passed, or are struggling, or in need of hope. So they are very meaningful to us. Some of us tear off individual rose pedals and gently place them in the water, keeping silent moments of peace and hope to ourselves. But once we release the roses into the water, we open our arms again, giving each other a hug and a kiss on the cheek. It is another chance to tell each other how much we appreciate our friendships and our united stand as breast cancer survivors wishing and hoping that there will someday be a cure.

We consider everyone to be equal, and we know what each of us has gone through, is going through, or will go through. There are certain times when one of us may be struggling to paddle in the boat, but that only makes us work harder for one another. Just like three musketeers say, ... no, not those on the candy bar, ...the real musketeers, ... "All for one and one for all". Except there are more than three of us on this team. More like 25. And all that matters is that we are in this together.

When you look at us we have on our matching pink lifejackets, team jerseys, and carbon fiber paddles. Between us lies a mutual silence and understanding. You will not understand unless you become one of us. We are strong women that have come on a long journey and are looking for nothing more than to reach out to women and pull them on board, if and when they are ready. And sometimes before they are ready. As our steersperson says: “Take it away”. You will forever see us paddle in the river saving lives and taming dragons.

### *Hold the Boat*

From the moment I joined this team, there was an immediate feeling of social support. Not so much the type of support that you might get from a cancer support group, per se. Instead it is something very unique. To us, support includes just listening to each other if one of us has questions. I remember back to my first dragon boat festival. I felt bad for Gina, because I hounded her with questions like, “Why are we doing this? Or, “How does this work?” I must have seemed like a nagging child at Christmas time. I’m pretty sure I had gotten on Gina’s nerves by the end of the day. That’s ok. She has since forgiven me for my behaviour and did not mind a newbie asking questions.

Asking each other questions is, in part, about getting the knowledge and guidance that we need from others who have experienced similar things. When I joined the team and started going to pre-season training and was getting to know some of my teammates, it was nice to be able ask questions about breast cancer, in addition to dragon boating itself. As a result, I’ve gotten a wealth of information on everything from the physical limitations I am experiencing, to the pros and cons about reconstruction. I’ve also gotten a lot of insight into the whole diagnosis part of the breast cancer experience from my teammates. I really couldn’t ask for more support than I have received from these women since I met them.

Within our team, whether you’re having a good day or a bad one, sometimes all it takes is a few words of encouragement to lift each other up. The words come in many forms ranging from simple motivational phrases, to technical feedback on our paddling form, to verbal hugs and phone calls. Plus, we’re even known to turn certain women that were not the “huggy-type” into huggers after spending time with the rest of us. When

one of us needs support, we are always there willing to lend a shoulder to cry on, an ear to listen, or a helping hand to assist. Most significantly, you will never see us not carrying each other.

Social support to our dragon boat team is more than what you might think. It also includes showing up to a workout or practice and seeing familiar women with smiles on their faces (and although hellos and hugs are not required, they are always appreciated). There is not one practice in which you will see us paddling in the river and we are not laughing, whooping, and hollering. And we are almost always singing. Well, at least once at every practice anyway. We'll be sitting in the boat on a water break, and we'll hear our drummer Gina start singing one of our team chants. From there, there is almost no choice but to get caught up in it all and sing along. We sometimes sing so loud that people along the riverbanks hear us and stop and look, as if there was any chance that they might otherwise miss a dragon boat of women in pink lifejackets singing about cancer.

One of the most valuable aspects of our team is that we are all ultimately fighting for the same thing, which is to find a cure for breast cancer. And we're doing the best we can to stand by one another as we wait for that cure to be found. But having others who share the experience of breast cancer diagnosis is very powerful. As you get older, generally speaking, you tend to have only a few really good friends that you are close to and get support from. But as far as having a large group of women that you can really relate too and also get support from, it is uncommon. That's what wonderful about this team.

For us social support, friendship, and camaraderie are basically interchangeable terms. A while ago, some of the women were talking about how as the workouts had increased, so did the amount of camaraderie. At each practice a woman is paired with a different woman to give us all a chance to meet and know each other better. As a result, we learned so much about one another, ranging from details about our cancer diagnosis to our pet peeves. Sometimes this strategy was too effective, because there were days when we got yelled at for talking *too* much. We would all stand there frozen like a deer in the headlights and we would mutter to ourselves, "Yep, we better step it up a bit before the intensity of workouts does".

And that brings me to the most disliked plyometric exercise that was ever created ... burpees. Burpees are a full-body exercise that involves starting in a standing position, going into a squat position and planting feet and hands on the ground, and then back to squat position and a standing position. Why anyone would do that to themselves voluntarily is beyond me. However, despite how hard they are, and perhaps because they are so hard, we all enjoy the fellowship that is formed from conversations, the questions that are asked and answered, and the laughter and smiles that are left on everyone's faces at the end of a workout. But burpees? Yeech.

For our team, camaraderie also includes our families, children, and friends. At some of the festivals you can see some of our family wandering around wearing shirts with our team logo. In fact, the shirts say "Support Team". It's actually pretty funny seeing our spouses wearing them. Even our children, and sometimes grandchildren, attend some of the festivals. Seeing their smiling faces cheering us on and providing hugs afterwards is more than enough to make us proud. Without the support of our teammates, family, and friends I am not sure where we would be today. They let us know that we are doing ok. And aided by their love and support, we keep on trucking every day, living life to the fullest.

To us, this has been a very special journey. We are able to bond together as a team and share our wisdom and knowledge to help one another as we conquer the cancer dragon.

### *Reach*

Our strength begins at the start line. Our bodies cry sweat and tears with every stroke we paddle. Our heart rate increases as our first six strokes are deep, and then the next six get faster, and another six, and another six, until we hear "three, two, one" and find our race pace. We continue paddling, breathing, and feeling the pull of each stroke. Our drummer counts and yells words of encouragement, as we stay in sync. We keep telling ourselves, "Just a bit more to go until the end". And no matter what the end result is, you know that everyone gave 110%. That is a feeling of accomplishment.

We live for this feeling; it is what we spend months training for. The sudden rush we get when we have crossed the finish line. The feeling that we physically and mentally

pushed ourselves past our limits. That is truly an amazing experience. We know that when we are in the boat we are living proof there is life after breast cancer.

We get so much strength from this team. Okay, this isn't the strongman strength that you may typically think of. But to us it's so much more. Our team is like a community; we form strength and perseverance that is built from our support and love for one another. When you look at it, we all share something that could kill us, yet not one of us ever acts like it could or will. That is where the strength lies.

Our ability to experience so much personal strength stems from the optimism and enthusiasm of being on this dragon boat team. When you see us, you see pink, maybe even the pink sequin that acts as a metaphor for our optimism, brightness, and laughter. Our personal strength is like a tight rope bracing two trees. Except that even though our rope was cut too soon, the trees are still standing. Personal strength is this inner muscle that has grown deep down inside us as a result of going through the cancer experience. The more we fight and hold on the bigger it grows.

That reminds me of a short story that I would like to tell you about. We had just finished racing in a heat against three other mixed teams, and we had just arrived at the tent to drop off our paddles and lifejackets as we waited for the next heat. It was then that we overheard one of the other coaches yelling. Wondering what it could possibly be about, we listened in. It was the coach of the mixed team next to us. He was telling his athletes, in no uncertain terms, that it was unacceptable for them to let a "girls' team" beat them in a race. It didn't take long for us to realize that they were talking about us. Let me tell you, far from being offended, a bunch of middle- to late-aged women enjoyed being called girls; not to mention the fact that their coach was so agitated that we whipped their butts. I think we all felt like we were 21 again.

To this day, that story is told over and over again. When we're all in the boat together, we do not even think of breast cancer. Instead, we're just like any other women's dragon boat team. When we race, we are competitors on a women's team. And it is only onshore that we think of ourselves as breast cancer survivors. That's just how we like to think of ourselves. We may have lost boobs, and perhaps some of us feel some of our femininity has been lost with them, but we accept ourselves and our bodies for who we are and what they are. Especially, when we're in a dragon boat.



As breast cancer survivors it is important for us to take care of ourselves and do everything we can to keep our personal strength. Joining the dragon boat team is one of the best things that most of us have done for ourselves since our cancer diagnosis. Together we are able to share things that no one else knows about or understands. We do this together, both laughing and crying, sharing precious moments sitting in the boat during practice with the river as calm as can be, the sky streaming beautiful colors of orange, pink, and blue, and silence along the riverbanks. One of us will say, “What a peaceful and beautiful night it is on the river”. We will all agree, taking in the breathtaking view and feelings that we get from sitting in the boat with other members of our breast cancer team. Moments like these seem a perfect way to end a busy day, allowing us the opportunity to leave our stresses and frustrations on the water. Watching the sun go down over the horizon gives us another reason for us to be thankful for our personal strength. Being where we are at that moment would not have been possible without the help of the rest of the dragon boat team.

When you look at our team it always has a positive energy, and nothing really fazes us. Because we’ve had cancer. And we have survived. But little did we know that surviving breast cancer would open our eyes to a world of hope, challenge, inspiration, humor, and, most importantly, courage. We all have different levels of courage, but I will say one thing...the day that we all step into the dragon boat, no matter what the date or year, that was the day that courage became our best friend. Without courage and personal strength, we may have stopped living, stopped believing, and reluctantly given up on an opportunity to look into the eyes of the dragon and tell him to get out. Once someone has joined this team, there is no looking back. We face the dragon every time we’re in the boat racing. And as comrades we stand up to him drawing our paddles like swords, striking the water with the blades of our paddles. As if we were slaying the dragon. We use every ounce of our personal strength with every stroke. The strokes might get faster and deeper, but we do our best to stay in sync. And the minute we cross the finish line, the dragon is put to rest.

### 3.5 Discussion

Researchers have shown the sport of dragon boating to be a unique survivorship experience for women with breast cancer (McKenzie, 1998; Parry, 2008). The breast cancer literature has demonstrated camaraderie as a prominent finding in the dragon boat experiences of breast cancer survivors (McDonough, et al., 2008; McDonough et al., 2011; Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Mitchell et al., 2007; Sabiston et al., 2007; Unruh & Elvin, 2004); however, there remains a lack of research that has explored the depth of this construct. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the camaraderie narratives of breast cancer survivors in a season of dragon boating. The findings demonstrated that the five themes: *attention please*, *paddles up*, *take it away*, *hold the boat*, and *reach* played an important role in the camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in a season of dragon boating. Camaraderie in turn, played an important role in the survivorship experiences of the women.

#### *Attention please*

“Attention please” is a command used in dragon boating given by the official during a race right before the air horn is signaled to start the race. For the theme with a similar name, I highlighted the women’s experiences as to why they were attracted to a breast cancer survivor dragon boat team. The women chose *Attention please* as the metaphor because it signifies the beginning of the race, just as there is also a beginning to joining a breast cancer survivor dragon boat team. Some of the reasons the women were attracted to dragon boating included the shared experience of breast cancer and dragon boating, fun, humor, and fitness/physical activity. Several studies in the breast cancer literature support these findings.

Unruh and Elvin (2004) and Mitchell et al. (2007) both showed that breast cancer survivors often join a dragon boat team to be with other survivors who share a similar cancer experience, as well as due to an interest in the sport of dragon boating. Furthermore, these studies also concluded that the women in their study were interested in dragon boating as a means to be physically active, to experience health and fitness benefits (e.g., strength), as well as challenge physical limitations (e.g., range of motion)

that they might have from breast cancer treatments. In my study, physical activity was also an important reason for the women's participation in dragon boating, more specifically for both health and fitness benefits and to help prevent reoccurrence.

In addition to physical activity, the women in my study said that they participated on a breast cancer dragon boat team to have fun. The women described having fun as laughing, joking around, enjoying the time spend time with one another, and the excitement of being able to race. In Mitchell and Nielsen's (2004) study, having fun was a theme that represented an important part of breast cancer survivors' participation on a breast cancer dragon boat team. The women in their study stated that having fun was a natural part of the sport, because racing was exciting and allowed them to demonstrate pride for their breast cancer team. Furthermore, the women in my study enjoyed the company of other women and engaging in humor and jokes within the team. While the women stated that they were attracted to dragon boating for the shared experience, fun, humor, and physical activity, it is these experiences that led to the formation of a common bond.

### *Paddles up*

"Paddles up" is a call made by the steersperson to paddlers to get their paddles up right before the team starts to paddle. This command is the first call made to launch the boat from the dock and start the race. The women chose *Paddles up* as a metaphor for their common bond, because for them *Paddles up* represents their unity of motion. Furthermore, it is the women's tradition to end all of their team e-mails and meetings with *Paddles up*, as it signifies that the women are all in this together both in the boat and on land. The women stated that this common bond includes the building of a comfortable and safe environment, offering guidance to each other, and an opportunity to share in commitment and hard work.

The women also stated that they feel comfortable and safe knowing that all the women on the team share a similar breast cancer experience (e.g., life after breast cancer). Mitchell and Nielsen (2002) stated that breast cancer survivors' connection with other women on their team creates a "comfort zone" (p.52). Because of their comfort zone, the women know that other women understand their experiences that may have

resulted from breast cancer surgeries and treatments, and that there is an environment in which women are able to receive guidance about breast cancer from one another. Sometimes the shared understandings are non-verbal. For example, the literature has documented that women on a dragon boat team often have an unspoken knowing among them (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Mitchell et al., 2007). In my study, the women explained that this unspoken knowing included relating to one another about common physical changes that occur as a result of breast cancer (e.g., hair loss and weight gain).

The women in my study also spoke of guidance received from one another as including verbal discussions specifically about their experiences, including receiving knowledge about or asking questions pertaining to breast cancer and dragon boating. This is consistent with research by Sabiston et al. (2007) who explored the physical self-perceptions and social support of breast cancer survivors involved in dragon boating. They concluded that the women in their study felt comfortable knowing that other women on the team were available to provide guidance about breast cancer when needed. However, their questions requiring guidance from other women were often not about cancer per se, but rather related to their team goal (“life after breast cancer”). This finding is similar to Mitchell et al. (2007) who also found that dragon boating created a common bond for breast cancer survivors to remove the focus from cancer to a focus on health and well-being.

Additionally, the women in my study also engaged in other verbal discussions on topics like family, work, weather, shopping, and exercising. Even though many conversations were focused on topics other than breast cancer, the women considered these discussions as offering a common bond in that they were still providing guidance to one another. For example, the women in my study often spoke about their families and work, thus keeping one another updated on the current status of their lives. Tocher (2002) portrayed similar experiences in her book *How to Ride a Dragon*; the women in her study reported engaging in discussions with other women about their families, work, friends, and other personal aspects of their lives. The discussion in Tocher’s (2002) book revealed that these types of verbal discussions are a natural part of the women’s common bond and participation in dragon boating.

While guidance was one of the important aspects of common bond, for the women in my research, participating on a dragon boat team included commitment, hard work, and the willingness to provide one another with encouragement. Commitment and hard work to the women meant training with their teammates for six months of the year, beginning with pre-season training (e.g., March) and ending after the last competition of the official dragon boat season (e.g., August). Furthermore, they described hard work as requiring pushing themselves both physically and mentally, as well as performing to the best of their ability at dragon boat races. Again, these results are consistent with Mitchell and Nielsen (2002), who found that their participants reported dragon boating to require an ongoing commitment to attend trainings and practices, as well the hard work necessary to achieve their goals as a team.

#### *Take it away*

“Take it away” is called by the steersperson to paddlers to begin paddling. This command is usually called when the boat is docked and ready to launch. However, *take it away* is also used when the paddlers are at rest in the water and need to be called to resume paddling. For the women in my research, the theme *take it away* is a metaphor representing the role of friendship. *Take it away* symbolizes paddlers in action to begin to move the boat, just as at the beginning of each dragon boat journey, friendships are made. And it is these friendships that initiate the action of moving forward with their lives after breast cancer. To the women, their many friendships include loving and caring for one another, as well as believing in their team and each other.

The women consider everyone on the team to be their friends. An act of love or care consists of, but is not limited to, hugs, phone calls, social gatherings, gifts, and kind words. This type of friendship is explained well by Parry (2009), who found that dragon boating creates a common bond among breast cancer survivors that leads to the formation of friendships and emotional support. Similarly, McDonough et al. (2011) showed that breast cancer survivors in their research also developed friendships with their teammates. In my study, the women stated that friendship consisted of spending a significant amount of time with other women on the team, as well as being there for one another as a type of emotional support. As shown by both Parry (2007) and Tocher (2002), breast cancer

survivors on dragon boat teams feel loved and cared for one another similar to that of family members.

Frequently, the women used phrases such as “we’re all in this together” during practices and dragon boat races. These types of words are commonly reported in the breast cancer literature. For instance, Mitchell and Nielsen (2002) stated that the women in their study used “we’re all in the same boat” to represent the camaraderie and friendships that formed among them. For the women in my study, “we’re all in this together” not only represented their friendship, but also the encouragement to move beyond some of the limitations and fears that result from a breast cancer diagnosis. The women used positive and encouraging words and gestures (e.g., hugs and high fives) during practices and races to demonstrate that believing in themselves can lead to a hopeful future and acceptance of their breast cancer experience.

#### *Hold the boat*

“Hold the boat” is a command called by the steersperson as a command to paddlers to stop the boat. The boat usually needs to be stopped right after the boat crosses the finish line, docking, and a few other scenarios. *Hold the boat* was chosen to represent social support, seemingly one of the most important aspects of a breast cancer survivor dragon boat team. When the *hold the boat* command is given, the blades of the women’s paddles are put into the water, alongside the boat, to keep the boat from moving. As the women are supporting the boat, they are also metaphorically *holding the boat* for each other on and off land.

Social support for the women included sharing information on breast cancer and the greater breast cancer experience with other women on the team. In fact, the women frequently used camaraderie interchangeably with social support, referring to just being there and listening to one another when questions arose and to encourage each other during practices and races. This is consistent with the McDonough et al. (2008), Parry (2007), and Sabiston et al. (2007) studies, who all found that women receive informational and emotional support from one another, as well as being able to relate to one another through their personal experiences. In my study, informational support included cancer treatments, surgeries, and other changes to the women’s lives.

Emotional support consisted of having a relatable experience to the other women and feeling comfortable to share their feelings and experiences about breast cancer.

Furthermore, the women stated that emotional support consisted of an unconditional support that existed between the women on the team, which is commonly demonstrated in the breast cancer literature. According to Parry (2008), unconditional support includes empathy and appreciating other women's experiences, as well as providing a supportive environment within a team. Thus, the women in my study viewed unconditional support as a means for encouragement and motivation from the other women as well as a way to make a difference in the other women's lives.

Based on the literature, and the types of social support provided on a breast cancer team, it is not surprising that cohesion was apparent in both the literature and my study. Culos-Reed et al. (2005) described dragon boating as a very cohesive environment, which offers a tremendous amount of support for breast cancer survivors. While the women in my study, spoke about the connection and support they experienced from the other women, they also discussed the support that they received from their families, which included attending dragon boat festivals and cheering on wives, mothers, aunts, and grandmothers. Tocher (2002) explained that women view their family as an important part of their social network and their breast cancer experiences. More specifically, family members are able to see the women's pride and hope as they overcome their cancer diagnosis.

The giving and receiving of support is often demonstrated in the breast cancer survivorship literature (McDonough et al., 2008; Parry, 2007; Sabiston et al., 2007), including women wanting to expand their social network and meet new people. The women in my study were eager to connect with other women that underwent the same traumatic experiences, but not necessarily in the form of an actual support group. Mitchell et al. (2007) explained that breast cancer survivors enjoy participating in dragon boating because they receive needed social support without a focus on cancer. For the women in my study, social support from their dragon boat team provided them a means to gain the personal strength they needed to accept cancer and move forward with their lives.

## *Reach*

“Reach” is the dragon boat term called by the steersperson, drummer, and/or coach to paddlers as a command for them to reach their paddlers further alongside the boat to get a stronger stroke. Metaphorically speaking, *reach* signifies the personal strength that the women have experienced from participating on a breast cancer survivor dragon boat team. To the women in my research, personal strength consisted of the desire to take care of themselves, a sense of accomplishment, wanting to fight for breast cancer cures, moving on with their lives after breast cancer, and the creation of positive energy and a positive environment.

The women’s narratives showed that joining the dragon boat team was itself a way to take care of themselves and control of their lives. In Parry’s (2008) study, women stated that dragon boating meant doing something healthy physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Furthermore, Mitchell et al. (2007) found that women experienced a loss of control over their lives as a result of cancer, and that dragon boating helped them regain that control. Additionally, the women in Mitchell et al.’s (2007) study reported that through dragon boating a conscious effort is made to prioritize health and well-being, which also helps breast cancer survivors to feel in control of their lives. As a result, they can begin anew to view their lives with joy, strength, and clarity; and once again focused on feelings of accomplishment.

Accomplishment to the women meant feeling proud of themselves and their teammates for pushing themselves to be their best both in and out of the boat. The women in my study often spoke about paddling in the boat and the sense of accomplishment felt when the entire team was giving everything it had to find the limits of their own strength, health, and power. Similarly, in Mitchell and Nielsen’s (2002) study, participants mentioned feelings of accomplishment knowing that 22 women were paddling in sync using all of their energy, but that they felt like winners just by being in the boat with other breast cancer survivors. Like Mitchell and Nielsen’s (2002) study, the women in my research stated that they felt like they had already won just by stepping into the boat and fighting breast cancer. Thus, it appears that moving on with life after breast cancer means engaging in new opportunities, such as dragon boating, that provide women



with hope, challenge, and the strength to fight breast cancer (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Sabiston et al., 2007; Tocher, 2002).

In Mitchell and Nielsen's (2002) study the theme of embracing life after breast cancer diagnosis emerged, which seems to require a changing outlook on life and a focusing on the positives needed to embrace life to its fullest. In my study, a part of this experience was that the women no longer let the little things in life bother them, as they subsequently seem so small in comparison to surviving cancer. Furthermore, Tocher (2002) found that women can develop a sense of personal strength from other women, which can drive an ambition to take each day one at a time and to focus on the positive environment that dragon boating creates. Additionally, Mitchell and Nielsen (2002) described the positive environment in dragon boating as physical and social in nature, thus allowing women to embrace their lives after breast cancer and focus on the present. Similarly, the women in my study stated that dragon boating created a positive environment in which they could live in the moment and focus on the positive aspects of their lives instead of breast cancer.

### **3.5.1 Summary of Themes**

The five themes (*attention please, paddles up, take it away, hold the boat, and reach*), although each unique, do share some overlap amongst them making clear distinctions between them a challenge at times. The shared experiences of breast cancer and dragon boating was particularly evident in the themes *attention please, paddles up, and hold the boat*. In order for the women to be attracted to dragon boating, experience a common bond, and social support; a shared breast cancer experiences and interest in dragon boat was needed. The shared experiences of breast cancer and dragon boating was a natural part of the team's camaraderie experiences and created a sense of belonging, togetherness, and social support that the woman experienced from participating in dragon boating.

Additionally, an overlap occurred between *paddles up* and *hold the boat*, as both themes focused on knowledge, guidance, and information. In *paddles up*, the knowledge and guidance that the women received were not limited to topics of breast cancer. They also discussed body image, physical activity, clothing, weather, family, friends, and other

topics of interest to them that they shared with other women. For *hold the boat*, the women described the information and guidance as focused more on the emotional and informational aspects pertaining to breast cancer. For example, the conversations were more centered on treatment, surgery, recovery, and medical care. Taken together, *paddles up* and *hold the boat* represented social support, which included knowledge, guidance, and information on breast cancer and other topics of interest.

Furthermore, *paddles up* and *reach* also overlapped with the focus on “life after breast cancer”. For the women, the focus of dragon boating was to move beyond their breast cancer experiences. This was evident in their team goal (“life after breast cancer”), which was a natural representation across themes. The team goal symbolized the present and positive aspects of the women’s lives. Accomplishment, hope, and strength were developed from that team goal and the positive environment of dragon boating.

Similarly, the overlapping of themes has been demonstrated in other qualitative research. For instance, Woekel and Ebbeck (2013) explored self-compassion in women with post partum depression and coping with their changes bodies. In their study, several of the themes overlapped creating commonalities across themes, leading them to suggest that future research explore the overlap to better understand the interaction of the components of self-compassion and the relevance for individuals. In my case, it would be beneficial for future research to continue to explore the overlap between *attention please*, *paddles up*, *hold the boat*, *take it away*, and *reach*. Further exploration would lead to a clearer understanding of the commonalities and differences that occur between the themes and the relevance in the women’s camaraderie experiences in a season of dragon boating. More specifically, some of the commonalities and differences that would be important to explore may include shared breast cancer and dragon boat experiences, social support (e.g., knowledge, guidance and information), and “life after breast cancer”.

While several overlaps in the themes occurred, there was also an important distinction among the five themes. For example, *attention please* was distinguished from the other themes since it focused on the women participating in dragon boating for physical activity and health benefits. More specifically, the women participated in dragon boating to be healthy, fit, and prevent cancer occurrence. Given that the women

participated in dragon boating for several reasons, it is not surprising that physical and health benefits were one of the major reasons for being attracted to dragon boating.

In conclusion, there were overlaps between themes, but also important differences between them. The five themes as a collective represent separate components of the women's camaraderie experiences, but taken together, show that women participate in dragon boating for the shared experiences of breast cancer, the activity of dragon boating itself, and many physical and health benefits.

### **3.5.2 Reflection on Theoretical Frameworks**

Because of the lack of a camaraderie-specific theory, the models of social provisions and cohesion were used as theoretical frameworks to guide my study. Five of the six social provisions in the social provisions model were evident in my research: social integration (shared breast cancer and dragon boat experience), attachment (friendship), opportunity for nurturance (common bond), and reassurance of self-worth (support and encouragement), and guidance (knowledge and information). First, social integration represented the women's shared breast cancer and dragon boat experiences, which was one of main reasons the women participated in dragon boating. Second, attachment consisted of friendship, which the women described as loving and caring for one another. The women formed friendships naturally from the prolonged time spent dragon boating. Third, opportunity of nurturance referred to common bond. Common bond consisted of building a comfortable and safe environment, offering guidance to each other, and an opportunity to share in commitment and hard work. Fourth, reassurance of self-worth represented support and encouragement. Support included sharing information on breast cancer and understanding the breast cancer experiences among the team. Furthermore, encouragement was present at practices and festivals, where the women provided one another with positive reinforcement. Fifth, guidance included knowledge and information. For the women, guidance consisted of information on breast cancer, dragon boating, and other topics of interest.

The sixth provision, reliable alliance, however, was not represented in the data. Reliable alliance consists of depending on others for tangible assistance (Weiss, 1974), which the women did discuss as being an important aspect of their perceived social

support. Despite this finding, I would be hesitant to conclude that reliable alliance does not exist in the context of a breast cancer survivor dragon boat team. Russell and Cutrona (1987) stated that different provisions are needed based on different circumstances. Perhaps certain provisions are more relevant for breast cancer survivors involved in dragon boating as a result of its unique context. However, whether or not this is the case is not known at present. What is clear, is that in my study the women demonstrated perceived social support on social integration, attachment, opportunity for nurturance, reassurance of self-worth, and guidance.

Furthermore, all four components of cohesion were supported by the women's experiences. First, ATG-T consisted of the women's feelings toward their team goal ("life after breast cancer"). The women discussed that they felt positive about their team goal and it helped the team move beyond their breast cancer experiences. Second, ATG-S referred to the women's feelings about the team's social relationships. The women reported positive feelings about the team's social relationships, emphasizing that close friendships had developed from participation in dragon boating and shared breast cancer experiences. GI-T consisted of the women's intimacy and bonding with the other women on their team goals. For the women, "life after breast cancer" created the bond and the intimacy between them, as the team was striving to move beyond their breast cancer experiences. GI-S referred to the women's ability to remain close and bond together as a team because of the development of their social relationships. The women explained that they experienced close friendships and a common bond because of the social relationship that developed from breast cancer and participating on a dragon boat team. In summary, dragon boating was clearly demonstrated to be a comfortable and safe environment for the women to develop social relationships, common bonds, and a sense of belonging. Furthermore, cohesion developed from the women's team goal, which then facilitated a common bond and sense of belonging.

While the model of social provisions and cohesion were consistent with the data, the process of selecting the social support and cohesion models for the study was lengthy and challenging. I spent time reading, reflecting, and consulting with colleagues about appropriate models to use. I decided to use social support and cohesion models since both constructs appear to be strongly linked to the construct of camaraderie.

Furthermore, selecting a particular social support model to use was especially challenging since no specific social support model appears to be commonly used in the breast cancer literature, as was discussed earlier. My decision to use Weiss's (1974) model of social provisions was informed largely by Holland and Holahan's (2003) study on breast cancer survivors, as well as Duncan et al.'s (1993) study on exercise. Taken together these studies support the model of social provisions as being applicable to both breast cancer survivors and physical activity, the specific focus of my research.

Holland and Holahan (2003) found four social provisions (e.g., attachment, reassurance of self-worth, social integration, and guidance) in the perceived social support of breast cancer survivors in their work. Furthermore, the four provisions were comparable to descriptions of social support in previous breast cancer literature in which social support has been referred to as knowledge, information, guidance, and shared breast cancer and dragon boat experiences, all of which are represented in the provisions (McDonough et al., 2008; McDonough et al., 2011; Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Unruh & Elvin, 2004). Considering that social support aligned with the model of social provisions, it became evident to me in the development of my research that the model was an appropriate theoretical framework for my work with breast cancer survivors. However, given that my study focused on dragon boating, it was important that the model of social provisions also be applicable to physical activity. Duncan et al. (1993) specifically stated perceived social support to be important for special populations (e.g., breast cancer survivors) involved in physical activity, in order to better understand the role the social support plays in their health and well-being.

To the best of my knowledge, Culos-Reed and colleagues (2005) are the only researchers that have examined cohesion in breast cancer survivor dragon boat teams. Specifically, they found high task and social cohesion in dragon boating, and that individual attraction to the group was the best predictor of cohesion. Similarly, my study found dragon boating to be a supportive and cohesive environment that facilitated common bond, formation of friendships, and a sense of belonging. The agreement in findings between these two studies is particularly notable because of the very different methodologies employed in their (i.e., quantitative correlational) and my (i.e., qualitative narrative) research.

Together, social support and cohesion seemed to adequately represent many of the camaraderie experiences of the women. In addition, I highlighted the components of the model of social provisions and cohesion that were prominent in the women's camaraderie experiences, thus expanding the current knowledge and understanding about camaraderie. However, even though the data demonstrated the importance of social support and cohesion to represent the camaraderie experiences, the boundaries are not necessarily clear since camaraderie itself is not well defined.

### **3.5.3. Defining camaraderie**

One of the goals of my study was to provide insight into the definition of camaraderie, due to the lack of a well-defined conceptualization of camaraderie in the literature. The definition of camaraderie that I propose here to be used in future research is based on previous findings in the literature, the specific themes in my study, and of the language of the participants themselves. Based on these various sources, I suggest camaraderie, at least in the context of breast cancer survivors participating in dragon boating, be defined as *the shared experience of individuals brought together by a traumatic life event (i.e. breast cancer) and engaging in an activity where the focus is moving on with life after breast cancer*. I think that this definition makes a significant contribution to the breast cancer literature for several reasons.

First, the only clear definition of camaraderie I found when developing my research was from the Merriam Webster's dictionary. Merriam Webster's Dictionary (2014) defined camaraderie as "a spirit of good friendly fellowship". This definition of camaraderie is limited since it only focuses on the key word *fellowship* and does not address other elements of camaraderie that are stated in the breast cancer literature, such as shared experience, social support, and togetherness. According to that literature, camaraderie is typically described as social support, a sense of belonging, and togetherness (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Unruh & Elvin, 2004; McDonough et al., 2011). The definition that I created for camaraderie has some similarities to Mitchell and Nielsen's (2002) description of camaraderie who referred to it as shared experiences, a sense of belonging, and common bond. While these key words are kept in my definition; I also build on their specific description of camaraderie in that their description is not in

sufficient detail to adequately represent a definition of camaraderie in the context of breast cancer survivors and dragon boating. In my definition of camaraderie I added the key words: shared experiences, traumatic life event, physical activity, and moving on with live after breast cancer. I chose to add these key words to my definition since the women frequently discussed shared experiences, traumatic life event, physical activity, and moving on with live after breast cancer in their camaraderie experiences. More specifically, the women stated that their shared experiences consisted of their breast cancer and dragon boating experiences with the other women on the team. Shared experience included the women participating in dragon boating for the same interest in the sport and to be with other survivors whom shared similar breast cancer experiences. For the women, traumatic life event represented their survivorship, breast cancer diagnoses, and treatments that they had undergone as a result of cancer. The women discussed that having gone through a traumatic life event (i.e. breast cancer) not only brought them together, but also helped them to appreciate other traumatic life events that may occur in their lives. Moreover, physical activity was also important for the women since they participated in dragon boating for both health and fitness benefits and to help prevent reoccurrence. The women also stated that moving on with their lives after breast cancer was a key word in the definition of camaraderie because it was part of the team's goal. In particular, the women stated that they did not dwell on the fact that they had breast cancer, but focused on being in the present and embracing life to the fullest. In addition, the women discussed that moving on with their lives consisted of being positive and developing a sense of personal strength from the other women, which stemmed from the positive environment that dragon boating creates. Furthermore, my definition of camaraderie was created in collaboration with the women and it was agreed upon that my definition of camaraderie best described their experiences in a season of dragon boating. Without a clear definition of camaraderie in the literature, we cannot be sure whether researchers in different studies mean the same thing or whether they are using the term camaraderie as a synonym for social support.

According to the breast cancer literature, social support is often included in the description of camaraderie, making it appear to the reader that the constructs are interchangeable (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; McDonough et al., 2008; McDonough et al.,

2011; Sabiston, et al., 2007; Unruh & Elvin, 2004). In Mitchell and Nielsen's (2002) study, the women used the word "social support" in their description of camaraderie in dragon boating. Furthermore in Unruh and Elvin's (2004) study, camaraderie was used interchangeably with social support and they did not provide a description that distinguished between social support and camaraderie in breast cancer survivors and dragon boating. As a researcher, this is a limitation because it creates a lack of clarity in the distinction between camaraderie and social support. In my study, the women stated that the five themes: *attention please*, *paddles up*, *hold the boat*, *take it away*, and *reach* made up their camaraderie experiences in dragon boating. Given that my study is the first to date, that has explored the depth of camaraderie in breast cancer survivors and dragon boating, I suggest that camaraderie should not be interchangeable with social support since the existing breast cancer literature has not exclusively addressed the limitation and the women in my study specifically stated that social support represented one aspect of their camaraderie experiences in dragon boating.

Second, social support only represents one aspect of camaraderie. According to the breast cancer literature, social support consists of shared breast cancer experiences and emotional and informational support (McDonough et al., 2008; McDonough et al., 2011; Sabiston et al., 2007). In my study, social support represented the women's shared experiences (e.g., breast cancer and dragon boating), emotional and informational support, friendship, encouragement, and common bond. For the women, the emotional and informational support included receiving knowledge on breast cancer surgeries, treatments, recovery, and medical care. Similarly, common bond consisted of knowledge on topics not limited to breast cancer such as family, friends, and work. The women also expressed that they often had available social support when it was needed. In addition, my definition of camaraderie is unique to social support because the women included the key word *shared experience* in their description of social support. More specifically, the women considered social support to be a valuable part of their shared breast cancer experiences including the emotional and informational support they received from the other women.

Third, the literature refers to camaraderie as a sense of belonging, common bond, and togetherness (McDonough et al., 2011; Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Unruh & Elvin,



2004), indicating that cohesion is different from camaraderie. In my study, cohesion consisted of the women sticking together in pursuit of their team goal (“life after breast cancer”). The women stated that feeling positive about their team led them to being able to move beyond their breast cancer experiences. Some of the positive aspects included hope, strength, and accomplishment, all of which enabled the women to achieve their team goal. Furthermore, the women’s positive feelings had developed social relationships that led to close friendships, a common bond, sense of belonging, and togetherness. Overall, the women expressed that dragon boat was a cohesive environment for their camaraderie experiences. My definition of camaraderie contributes to the literature on cohesion by empathizing that cohesion is present since the women are sticking together to achieve their goal of “moving on with their life after breast cancer”. Additionally, the women in my study considered cohesion to the feeling of a sense of belonging and togetherness in the shared experience with other breast cancer survivors on their dragon boat team.

In conclusion, social support and cohesion represented the shared breast cancer and dragon boat experiences among the women that included emotional and informational support, friendship, common bond, sense of belonging, and togetherness. For the women, dragon boating was a comfortable and safe environment to find social support and stick together as they moved beyond their breast cancer experiences. Given the prominence of camaraderie in the breast cancer literature (McDonough, et al., 2011; Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Unruh & Elvin, 2004), a conceptual definition of camaraderie was needed to better understand the camaraderie experiences of a breast cancer survivor dragon boat team. Furthermore, the concrete definition of camaraderie that I created aligned with the terminology of the literature and the breast cancer survivors. In addition, the definition of camaraderie provides a more clear focus on what camaraderie is and what it looks like in a breast cancer survivor dragon boat team, thereby providing an effective guide for future research in the area.

#### **3.5.4 Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research is judged on the criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My study followed six of Creswell’s suggested

strategies for trustworthiness: triangulation, prolonged engagement, member checking, rich thick descriptions, peer debriefing, and clarifying bias that allowed transferability to occur. Taken together, these six strategies were selected to check for the accuracy and credibility of the findings in this study (Creswell, 2009).

First, triangulation was achieved through observation, field notes, and focus group interviews; and these strategies enhanced the justification of the themes. Triangulation was further enhanced since I spent a significant amount of time with the women building trust and rapport, documenting field notes, and interviewing the women, leading to detailed and rich data. Over the course of the six months of the research project my involvement included attending numerous practices and festivals with the team. During my interactions with the team, I carried a small notebook and made mental and written notes of details and conversations from each practice and festival. Following each practice and festival, I expanded my recollections and jottings into full field notes that I typed in a Word document. The two focus group interviews, one interview at the beginning and the second concluding the season, were also an important source of triangulation especially because it was a collective narrative that I was writing.

Second, prolonged engagement allowed me to build trust and rapport, minimize distortion, and learn the context of the dragon boating environment (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It was crucial for me to build rapport with participants in order to understand their experiences (Creswell, 2009). Prolonged engagement included spending six months in the field with the women as I explored their camaraderie experiences over their season of dragon boating. During that time, I built trust and rapport with the women by engaging in conversations and getting to know each of them personally, which was crucial to enabling me to work collaboratively with the women. This allowed the women to feel comfortable to openly discuss their camaraderie experiences with me. Furthermore, persistent observation was also important to better understand dragon boating; it allowed for a meaningful and worthwhile time in the field. Additionally, the quality of the relationships that I developed with the women was crucial for the success of this study.

Third, participants had the opportunity to member check their stories that I interpreted and reconstructed. Member checking allowed participants an opportunity to make changes and corrections to accurately portray their camaraderie experiences

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Preceding the second focus group interview, I provided the women the opportunity to member check themes and descriptions that I had written for each of the five themes. The women and I discussed all five themes one at a time. I then asked the women if my interpretations were accurate representations of their camaraderie experiences. Following, the women were given the opportunity to make changes or corrections to their comments prior to signing the transcript release forms. None of the women requested changes to their comments, but this was still an important strategy that allowed me to have more confidence in the themes resulting from my data analysis.

Fourth, rich and thick descriptions were made to communicate the findings in the form of camaraderie narratives and enabled discussion of the participants' experiences to be shared (Creswell, 2009). By contextualizing the dragon boat setting, methods, participants, and results, my goal was to take readers on a journey into the setting and plot of the narratives (Creswell, & Miller, 2000). I decided to write the results as collective narratives since they specifically focus on traumatic life events (Bruner, 1999; Schiff & Noy, 2006). This strategy allowed me to represent the women's camaraderie experiences as a collective voice. Furthermore, after careful reflection on Oliver (1998) and Riessman's (2008) components of narratives (i.e., character, plot, setting, and events), I decided to use a character-based approach to tell the stories of the women, which ultimately allowed me to present a rich story of the women's experiences with the goal to provide readers opportunities to form their own conclusions as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Fifth, I performed a peer debrief with my supervisor by completing review sessions on the methods, meanings, and interpretations of the findings in my data analyses process. Peer debriefing ensures that findings are found in the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I frequently engaged in on-going conversations with my doctoral supervisor during the research process. At the beginning of the study, we discussed biases that I may have overlooked since I was focused on details of the study, trust and rapport, methodological decisions, and my understanding of the area of study (Spall, 1998). As the study progressed, our meetings focused on interview questions, potential creative practice activities, scheduling focus group interviews and creative practice

activities, observations, personal support, alternative approaches, and data analyses (Spall, 1998). Peer debriefing was crucial to this study and confirmed that the findings were credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Lastly, as the researcher, I clarified the biases that I could have contributed to the research including my role as dragon boat coach, and methodological decisions in a reflexive journal throughout the research process (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflexivity is an important part of trustworthiness that adds credibility to qualitative research (Carolan, 2003). During the research process, I rigorously recorded and reflected on each encounter that I had with my participants (Carolan, 2003). Reflections of my worldview, assumptions, thoughts, feelings, and experiences in the field will help the readers understand how I portrayed my findings and conclusions (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The importance of reflexivity in my research was one of the driving forces behind my choice to share some of my own story in Section 1.3 of my dissertation, as it provides the reader a glimpse through the lens I brought to my work.

### **3.5.5 Limitations**

Although I believe my study has many demonstrated strengths, as highlighted throughout the preceding sections, there are a few specific limitations that I think are important to discuss. First, there was a challenge in writing the camaraderie narratives due to some of the limitations in the existing body of literature on collective narratives. All researchers interested in conducting collective narratives are faced with the challenge of finding research that supports their chosen methodology; however, to date there is no research on breast cancer survivors that that I am aware of that has attempted to produce collective narratives. Most of the research reported in a collective narrative format has been on holocaust survivors (Bruner, 1999; Schiff, Noy, & Cohler, 2001). In addition, as with other narrative methodologies, there are many different approaches to writing collective narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), making it particularly challenging integrating the narrative components into the collective narratives. Oliver (1998) and Riessman (2008) suggested that narratives should include character, plot, setting, and events. Thus, prior to writing the collective narratives, I reflected on each narrative

component and how I wanted them to be portrayed in my findings. After careful consideration, I wrote the collective narratives as nonfictional stories, but through a fictional character's experience, that were respectful and best suited to represent the women's camaraderie experiences. Given (2008) stated that a fictional character-based approach allows researchers to represent participants as characters and engage readers in the narrative. My decision to use the voice of one fictional character resulted from spending time reflecting on how I thought the women's collective voices could most effectively be represented in way that connected with the reader. Furthermore, the fictional character-based approach allowed me to use a dialogue that could directly demonstrate the stories and voices I wanted to portray as the women's camaraderie experiences (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002). Additionally, the fictional character-based approach helped me protect the confidentiality of the participants in my research, because had an approach other than collective narratives been used, specific individuals who participated might have been more easily identifiable.

Another limitation for this study was scheduling issues for data collection. My main methods of data collection consisted of focus group interviews and a creative practice activity. McLafferty (2004) stated that organizing focus group interviews can be challenging and time consuming since they require a different level of commitment from participants. Thus, for my study, organizing the focus group interviews and creative practice activity was difficult because of scheduling issues (e.g., due to work and family) for the women. Prior to starting the study, I was up front with the women as to the six month time frame of the study and the level of commitment required; however, this necessitated the plan to have a core group of participants. Another approach that I used to address this issue was increased design flexibility. I provided the women autonomy to decide on the dates and times that they would participate in the focus group interviews and creative practice activity. Unfortunately, the women had difficulty agreeing on specific dates and times, and as a result, the women and I needed to schedule the focus group interviews and creative practice activity based on availability of the majority of the women. Because of this, some of the women were subsequently unable to participate in the study. Therefore, I also included the voices of the women outside of the core group. Even though the women outside of the core group did not actively participate in the focus

group interviews and creative practice activities, I appreciated and valued their experiences and voices since they were still members of the dragon boat team.

A third potential limitation was related to the women's range of previous experience participating in dragon boating. The women's experience ranged from only just starting dragon boating to over five years of participation. The implication is that this might have resulted in very distinct differences in how the woman viewed camaraderie, as well as each of their understandings and meaning of camaraderie. To get around this type of limitation, McDonough et al. (2008) explored the psychosocial experiences of breast cancer survivors who were all in their first season of dragon boating. However, I made the choice to include all ranges of experience to better understand the camaraderie experiences of a breast cancer survivor dragon boat team from a group perspective. As the researcher, I invited the entire dragon boat team to participate in the study and have their voices and experiences to be heard. It was important that all ranges of experiences be included for the women's camaraderie experiences to be adequately represented in the findings. Furthermore, I did not consider their level of experience in my analysis because that would have caused challenges for participant recruitment and limit the women's experiences represented in my results. For participant recruitment, if I had criteria for ranges of experiences that would have excluded some of the women, and potentially caused rapport and trust issues with the women. Additionally, I did not want to limit the representation of the women's experiences since this study was collaborative in nature and their camaraderie experiences shaped the group perspective highlighted in my results. Nonetheless, it would be insightful for future researchers to focus on the length of experience in dragon boating as a way to see if it plays a critical role in women's camaraderie experiences (Parry, 2009).

### **3.5.6 Future Directions**

Based on the findings from this study, as well as previous research, camaraderie appears to be a vital component of breast cancer survivors' participation in dragon boating; as such, there are a number of possible directions for future research. Given that this study and the literature has discussed the importance of camaraderie for breast cancer survivor dragon boat teams, there is a need to create a conceptual model specific to camaraderie to inform studies on camaraderie experiences. One goal of a camaraderie model would be to further build on the definition of camaraderie and identify the important components of camaraderie for breast cancer survivors. As supported in my research, the foundation for the model would likely include aspects of social support and cohesion since both constructs seem to be important to women's camaraderie experiences. The camaraderie model could also integrate elements of the model of social provisions, particularly because of its use in providing insight into the women's perceived social support. Important provisions to include based on my research include: social integration (shared breast cancer and dragon boat experience), attachment (friendship), opportunity for nurturance (common bond), reassurance of self-worth (support and encouragement), and guidance (knowledge and information). In my study, these five provisions highlighted the women's perceived social support and reinforce the importance of social support in the women's camaraderie experiences. Additional components to the camaraderie model would likely include aspects of the four components of cohesion: Individual Attractions to the Group-Task (ATG-T), Individual Attractions to the Group-Social (ATG-S), Group Integration-Task (GI-T), and Group Integration-Social (GI-S), since they were also supported in the women's camaraderie experiences. My findings showed that cohesion developed from the women's team goal ("life after breast cancer"), thus creating a comfortable and safe environment for the women to experience a common bond, sense of belonging, and togetherness. Findings from my research provide evidence for the need of a camaraderie model, which would be particularly useful given the common use of the term camaraderie in the breast cancer literature (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; McDonough et al., 2008; McDonough et al., 2011; Sabiston, et al., 2007; Unruh & Elvin, 2004).

A second future direction would be to explore the camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in different running events. Evidence has suggested that breast cancer survivors participate in different physical activities (e.g., cycling, golfing, kayaking, running, and walking; McDonough et al., 2008). Given that camaraderie is a prominent finding in both the literature (McDonough et al., 2011; Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Sabiston et al., 2007; Unruh & Elvin, 2004) and my study, it would be quite valuable to explore the camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in different running events since camaraderie is an important aspect to their participation. My recommendations focus specifically on exploring the camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in running events, such as the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k, Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure 5k and Marathon for the Cure to develop an understanding of the social support and common goal of moving on with their lives after breast cancer (McDonough et al., 2011; Sabiston et al., 2007). Focusing on running events is important since running is the most popular type of endurance sport associated with breast cancer that fundraises and spreads breast cancer awareness (Kaiser, 2008).

While there has been paucity in the literature on breast cancer survivors' experiences and other physical activities, Burke and Sabiston (2010) explored breast cancer survivors' subjective well-being in a climb to Mt. Kilimanjaro. They found that climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro facilitated subjective well-being in the women and suggested that future research explore other physical activities for breast cancer survivors. Building on the insight provided in my research, exploring the camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in different physical activities would highlight distinctions and similarities between the physical activities and add more detail to the camaraderie experiences that may not otherwise be identified without further exploration such as shared breast cancer experiences, common bond, social support, friendship, and personal strength. Furthermore, an additional understanding of the camaraderie experiences in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k, Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure 5k, and Marathon for the Cure would greatly expand our understanding of the role camaraderie and how camaraderie may be experienced differently in each of these running events. Such research might uncover the relevance of the components of camaraderie such as shared breast cancer experiences, common bond, social support, friendship, and personal



strength in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k, Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure 5k, and Marathon for the Cure. Perhaps further research would also provide insight into what camaraderie looks like in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k, Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure 5k, and Marathon for the Cure and what components make up the women's camaraderie experiences in the different contexts.

Third, diversity appears to be a prominent limitation in the breast cancer and dragon boating literature (McDonough et al., 2008; McDonough et al., 2007; Mitchell et al., 2007). As a result, most of the women in the breast cancer survivor and dragon boating literature are Caucasian, educated, and of moderate to high socioeconomic status (McDonough et al., 2008; Sabiston et al., 2007). Unfortunately, there is no known research that has sufficiently explored issues of ethnicity within the breast cancer survivors and dragon boating literature. Mitchell and colleagues (2007) suggested that it is particularly important to explore breast cancer survivors' dragon boating experiences in other cultures and ethnicities given that dragon boat is an international sport. Future research should explore how ethnicity plays a role in women's camaraderie experiences, and more specifically how and what camaraderie looks like, what role culture plays in women's camaraderie experiences, and the importance of camaraderie in survivorship and participation in dragon boating. Given that the literature demonstrates the physical, psychological, and social benefits of dragon boating for breast cancer survivors (McDonough et al., 2008; McKenzie, 1998; Parry, 2008), further research would provide a unique perspective on the diversity of breast cancer survivors' camaraderie experiences within the context of dragon boating.

### **3.5.7 Summary**

In conclusion, this study was the first to specifically focus on the camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in a season of dragon boating. Overall, it demonstrates that women's camaraderie experiences are composed of shared interest and experiences in breast cancer and dragon boating, common bond, friendship, social support, and personal strength. My study also supports Weiss's (1974) model of social provisions and cohesion (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1985) as appropriate theoretical frameworks to frame research on camaraderie. However, a conceptual model specific to

camaraderie remains an important goal. Given that there is no clear conceptual definition of camaraderie in the present literature, I proposed a definition of camaraderie that could be useful in the context of breast cancer survivors and dragon boating. That definition describes camaraderie as *the shared experience of individuals brought together by a traumatic life event (e.g., breast cancer) and engaging in an activity where the focus is moving on with life after breast cancer*. Collectively, the findings of my research demonstrated that camaraderie was an important aspect of the women's involvement in a season of dragon boating, and particularly crucial in their ability to focus, as a collective, on their team goal "life after breast cancer".

## Chapter IV

### 4.1 General Discussion

The goal of this dissertation was to explore the body image and camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in endurance sporting events. Two studies were conducted to address this purpose. The first study explored the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. Study 1, is the first to broadly explore the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors in endurance sporting events associated with breast cancer. Moreover, it is also the first study to provide insight into body image experiences of breast cancer survivors in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. The second study explored the camaraderie narratives of breast cancer survivors in a season of dragon boating. Researchers have stated that camaraderie is essential to breast cancer survivors' participation in dragon boating (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Unruh & Elvin, 2004), and Study 2 is the first study to explore the camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors throughout a season of dragon boating.

Study 1 was a critical first step to exploring the experiences of breast cancer survivors, and focused specifically on their body image experiences. Three themes emerged from the data: *"new normal"*, *goal setting*, and *camaraderie*. Together, these themes represented the overall positive body image experiences of the women and their participation in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. Finding camaraderie to be a prominent aspect of the women's body image experiences, Study 2 focused on better understanding the camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in endurance sporting events and showed five themes evident in the women's camaraderie experiences: *attention please* (attraction to dragon boating), *paddles up* (common bond), *hold the boat* (social support), *take it away* (friendship), and *reach* (personal strength). *Attention please* referred to the women's reasons for why they were attracted to dragon boating, including shared breast cancer experiences, physical activity, and fun. In *paddles up*, the women spoke of a common bond that consisted of the shared experiences of breast cancer, giving and receiving guidance from one another on the team, sharing the team goal of life after breast cancer, and the commitment and hard work that they dedicated to their team. *Take it away* was described by the women as loving and caring for one another as well as

having faith and belief in themselves and their team. *Hold the boat* referred to the shared experiences of breast cancer and dragon boating, sharing and providing knowledge, informational support, encouragement, and meeting new people. *Reach* consisted of feelings of accomplishment, fighting for breast cancer and moving on with their lives, taking care of themselves, and positive environment and positive energy. Collectively, these themes show how the women's camaraderie experiences helped to meet their physical, emotional, and social needs following breast cancer diagnosis.

#### **4.2 Contribution to the Breast Cancer Survivors' Body Image Literature**

A significant contribution of my research to the breast cancer literature is in highlighting the role of camaraderie in the breast cancer survivors' body image experiences. Camaraderie was the motivating force that created overall positive body image experiences for the women. Since social support and cohesion were an important part of the women's camaraderie experiences, it was not surprising that body image experiences developed from participation in dragon boating and CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. More specifically, the women's shared experiences led to the development of social support and cohesion that allowed them to focus their physical capabilities, accept their bodies, and create positive overall body image experiences. Furthermore, the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating created comfortable and safe environments for the women to receive information on their body-related changes. In both Study 1 and Study 2, the women engaged in verbal discussions on reconstruction options, side effects of surgeries and treatments, and physical appearance. Through camaraderie, the women were able to share and understand one another's body image experiences throughout their training for the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and a season of dragon boating. These results most significantly support the work of McDonough et al. (2007) and Sabiston et al. (2008) who found dragon boating to be a comfortable environment for women to share knowledge and understanding on breast cancer and body image.

Given that CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating were comfortable and safe environments, camaraderie enabled the women to accept their bodies because of the shared breast cancer experience, support, and common bond from other breast cancer survivors. Moreover, research demonstrates that dragon boating focuses on physical

abilities needed to execute the sport (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Unruh & Elvin, 2004; Parry, 2008). In Unruh and Elvin's (2004) study, women focused on their physical abilities in dragon boating and overcoming limitations from breast cancer surgeries and treatments. My Study 1 and Study 2 point to similar conclusions, since participation in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating both seem to be activities that help to fulfill women's physical, emotional, and social needs following breast cancer diagnosis, as well as being environments that offer strength for women to move on with their lives and accept their limitations caused by body-related changes associated with breast cancer. This finding is not surprising given that sports participation in general helps women develop positive body image experiences (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997; Greenleaf, Boyer, & Petrie, 2009; Petrie & Greenleaf, 2011). My findings indicated that women's positive body image experiences resulting from participation in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating may be similar to those of other women who participate in sports. However, as Study 1 and Study 2 demonstrated, endurance sports can become more than a sport for women with breast cancer, providing them with opportunities for positive body image experiences and a renewed purpose in life following breast cancer diagnosis.

In Study 1, I learned three themes that were important to the women's body image experiences: the "*new normal*", *goal setting* and *camaraderie*. More specifically, the "*new normal*" was important to the women's body image since it consisted of adjusting to body-related changes from cancer including scarring from surgeries, treatments, and engaging in physical activities such as CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating. The second theme *goal setting* enabled the women to accomplish the goals of staying fit, being healthy, and controlling body shape. *Goal setting* was important to the women because they participated in endurance sports to be physically active, prevent cancer reoccurrence, and improve their health and quality of life. Through *goal setting*, the women felt that endurance sports was a mechanism for them to achieve their body image goals. The women stated that their positive body image experiences began with creating goals for themselves and accomplishing the goals through hard work and dedication. Furthermore, the women stated that camaraderie was an important part of *goal setting* because of the support from the other women that facilitated their positive body image experiences. *Camaraderie* consisted of the shared experience of survivorship that helped

the women come to terms with their body capabilities and created an overall positive body image experience. The women described the personal importance of the shared experience and support from other breast cancer survivors that included discussing body-related changes from cancer, feeling a sense of belonging, and striving together to promote “life after breast cancer”. Social support from the other women was an important component to the women’s *camaraderie* since it allowed them to accept their bodies and focus on their physical capabilities while training and participating in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. It was apparent that through *camaraderie* the women improve or maintained their body image while providing hope and spreading breast cancer awareness. Study 1 also demonstrated that further research was need to gain insight into what components represent camaraderie and what the camaraderie experiences look like for breast cancer survivors.

Study 2 extended beyond the body image findings of Study 1 in two ways: (1) by exploring the key components that made up the women’s camaraderie experiences that ultimately led to positive body image experiences and (2) the camaraderie found in dragon boating allowed the women to accept their bodies and focus on more on their physical capabilities, since dragon boating welcomed all body shapes and body types. First, the women described camaraderie as the shared interest and experiences in breast cancer and dragon boating, common bond, friendship, social support, and personal strength. Throughout their narratives, the women spoke about their body image experiences that included frequently engaging in conversations with other women about scarring, surgeries, treatment, and prostheses that provided them with reassurance as to what it is like being a breast cancer survivor. This was a natural part of the women’s camaraderie experiences since they spent six months with one another at dragon boat practices and festivals. More specifically, the themes common bond, friendship, and social support were particularly evident in the women’s discussion of body image in their camaraderie experiences. For the women, having a common bond included a shared understanding of what it is like to adjust prostheses in public or have reconstruction surgery that enabled the women to feel comfortable in confiding in one another for information and support on body image and breast cancer issues. The women referred to the common bond as a comfort zone where the women had an unspoken knowing of

including physical changes that occurred as a result of cancer such as hair loss and weight gain. Furthermore, friendship represented intimate relationships with the other women that included loving and care for one another and believing in their team and each other. Friendship helped the women accept their breast cancer and body image experiences since the women felt comfortable to express their personal experiences because they loved and cared for each other and were “all in the same boat”. In addition, social support included receiving informational and emotional support on breast cancer and body-related changes from cancer from the other women on the team. The women stated that dragon boating was a comfortable and safe environment for them to receive knowledge and guidance from the physical changes of their bodies as a result of cancer to listening, asking, and answering any questions that the women had about breast cancer or body image. Further, the women reported that they received more social support than they ever could have asked for from the other women that also led to learning about each other and insight on how to best support each other through their breast cancer and body image experiences. Taken together, the five themes created the overall camaraderie experiences that facilitated the women’s positive body image experiences that led to their team goal of “moving on with their lives after breast cancer”.

Second, for the women, the camaraderie found in dragon boating allowed them to accept their bodies because the sport welcomed all body shapes and body types. More specifically, the women had all different body shapes and body types and accepted their bodies since there was a place for everyone in the boat. Dragon boating allowed the women to accept their bodies since no matter what their body shape or body type was their strength and power was needed to help paddle and move the boat. Thus, dragon boating provided the women the opportunity to focus more on their physical capabilities than appearance-related qualities. The women stated that dragon boating required physical exertion and hard work to perform the sport to the best of their ability and required countless hours of training. The women focused more on their physical capabilities since the purpose of the sport was to condition their bodies for paddling. Training for dragon boating allowed the women to focus on performance and what their bodies were capable of doing since the women were competitive and enjoyed the hard work and effort that it took to dragon boat. Overall, Study 2 demonstrated that

camaraderie consisted of shared interest and experiences in breast cancer and dragon boating, common bond, friendship, social support, and personal strength that facilitated positive body image experiences including accepting their bodies and focusing more on their physical capabilities leading to enhanced quality of life.

#### **4.2.1 Contribution beyond Tocher's (2005) *How to Ride a Dragon***

A reflection on Tocher's (2005) book *How to Ride a Dragon* is needed since she provides readers with individual stories of 22 women with breast cancer, including stories of their diagnosis with breast cancer, how breast cancer has impacted their personal lives, and how the women became involved in breast cancer survivor dragon boat teams.

Tocher's (2005) book is unique since she focuses only on dragon boating and provides insight into how the women overcome their struggles with breast cancer by participating in breast cancer survivor dragon boat teams. My work contributes beyond Tocher's (2005) book *How to Ride a Dragon*, for three reasons: (1) Study 1 focused on the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors' participating in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k, (2), Study 1 and Study 2 both provided depth to the constructs of body image and camaraderie in breast cancer survivors and endurance sporting events, and (3) Study 2 used camaraderie narratives to focus on a group perspectives of breast cancer survivors participating in dragon boating.

First, in Tocher's (2005) book she only focused on dragon boating and was limited in the scope of discussion related to breast cancer survivors' *body image* experiences specifically. The women in Tocher's (2005) book discussed their body image experiences in regards to their breast cancer diagnosis, surgeries, and treatments. Furthermore, she talked about how the women felt after their surgeries and treatments and their body-related changes from cancer. Specifically, the women discussed a loss of femininity from losing breasts and scarring from surgeries. Tocher's (2005) book also stated that body image was an important part of the women's shared experiences in dragon boating. My work extends beyond Tocher's (2005) in that I explored the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors' in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. The theme "*new normal*" was similar to Tocher's description of the women getting used to body-related changes from cancer surgeries and treatments. However, the women in my Study



1 stated that the “*new normal*” also consisted of participating in different physical activities, such as the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. The women reported that participation in dragon boat prompted their interest in training and running the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k since it was a different endurance sport that also promoted breast cancer awareness. *Goal setting* was also important to the women’s body image experiences in Study 1 since the women set goals that specifically focused on eating healthy, staying fit, and controlling their body shape. The women stated that setting goals allowed them to feel better about themselves, improve their body image, and promoted a healthy lifestyle. For the women, endurance sports such as CIBC Run for the Cure 5k was a means to accomplish body image goals that led to positive body image experiences, and improved their health and quality of life. My work goes beyond Tocher’s discussion since the women in my study specifically stated that the “*new normal*” included participating in endurance sports such as CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating. Further, the women also stated that *goal setting* improved their body image since they achieved their body image goals through hard work and dedication that resulted in feeling better about themselves, preventing cancer reoccurrence, and enhancing their health and quality of life. In addition to *goal setting*, *camaraderie* was a salient theme in the women’s body image experiences since the support of other women allowed them to focus on their physical capabilities, accept their bodies, and create an overall body image experience in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. For the women in my study, *camaraderie* consisted of the shared experience of breast cancer experiences and social support that led to acceptance of their bodies and body-related changes that resulted from cancer. The women in my study had developed *camaraderie* with the other women during training and participation in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k that helped them to improve or maintain their body image while providing hope and support for breast cancer awareness. My work extended beyond Tocher’s (2005) in that the women in her book briefly discussed camaraderie in their dragon boat experiences, but did not explicitly explain what camaraderie is or the role of camaraderie in their body image experiences. Overall, Study 1 demonstrated that breast cancer survivors participated in endurance sporting events associated with breast cancer for many reasons, including the camaraderie and positive body image experiences.

Second, I explored the intersection between body image and camaraderie in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating. In Tocher's (2005) book, she only focused on dragon boating and briefly discussed body image and camaraderie. Study 1 and Study 2 focused specifically on body image and camaraderie whereas Tocher's (2005) book discussed the women's breast cancer diagnosis, stories of their personal lives, and how they started dragon boating. My work informed Tocher's (2005) by describing the relationship between the camaraderie and body image experiences for the women involved in both the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and a season of dragon boating. In Study 1 and Study 2, camaraderie was found to be the motivating force that created overall positive body image experiences for the women. Specifically, camaraderie enabled the women to share and understand each other's body image experiences throughout their training for the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and a season of dragon boating. Since both endurance sports were found to be natural, comfortable, and safe environments, the women in Study 1 and Study 2 engaged in discussions on body-related changes from cancer that helped them to accept their bodies and moved beyond their breast cancer experiences. Further, the camaraderie found in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating fulfilled the women's physical, emotional, and social needs that contributed to their positive body image experiences. My work informs Tocher's (2005) since the women in her book only discussed their body image experiences in regards to their breast cancer diagnosis, surgeries, and treatments and did not explicitly explain what camaraderie is nor the importance of camaraderie in their body image experiences and participation in dragon boating experiences.

Third, Study 2 focused on a group perspective to represent the women's camaraderie experiences. Tocher's (2005) book consisted of individual women's stories weaved together to tell stories of their breast cancer diagnoses, personal lives, and how they began dragon boating. A similar approach had been used in Parry's (2007) work on breast cancer survivors' and their lives after breast cancer in dragon boating. Parry's findings included stories on the women's diagnosis with breast cancer and how they became involved in breast cancer survivor dragon boat teams. My work extended beyond Tocher's (2005) and Parry's (2007) since it was the first research project to date that had used camaraderie narratives (e.g., collective narrative) in breast cancer survivor and

dragon boating. The camaraderie experiences were written collectively to represent all of the women's voices. I wrote the findings of Study 2 with the intention to draw readers into team stories that demonstrated what camaraderie consisted of for the women and what camaraderie look liked when they were at practices and dragon boat festivals. Specifically, I wrote five team stories that provided depth into the five themes: *attention please*, *paddles up*, *take it away*, *hold the boat*, and *reach* that represented the camaraderie experiences for the women. Furthermore, the team stories were unique to Tocher and Parry's since I provided more detail and depth into reasons why the women were attracted to dragon boat racing, common bond, friendship, social support, and personal strength, where as Tocher and Parry focused on breast cancer diagnoses and how the women began dragon boating. Thus, my work illustrated the importance of the five themes in the women's camaraderie experiences and their participation in dragon boating. It was important to choose an approach that worked best for the women and their voices to adequately represent the depth of the five themes found in their camaraderie experiences. In addition, Study 1 and Study 2 extended beyond Tocher's (2005) book, since I explored the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and their camaraderie experiences in a season of dragon boating. Taken together, both studies demonstrated that body image and camaraderie are important aspects to breast cancer survivors' participation in endurance sports.

### **4.3 Contribution to Theory**

White's (2000) model, Blood's (2005) social constructivism, Weiss's Model of Social Provisions (1974), and cohesion theory (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1985) all guided my research at various stages. White's (2000) model was initially created for cancer patients and their affected body part(s); however, my Study 1 was the first to employ White's (2000) model in breast cancer survivors and physical activity. Given that the model focused on body image as a multidimensional construct, I used it to ensure its dimensions (e.g., self-schema, body image schema, investment in changed body image feature, appearance, and emotions etc.) were reflected in the individual semi-structured interviews in Study 1. More specifically, I used White's model to guide questions related to thoughts, feeling, attitudes, and behaviours of body image in breast cancer survivors.

Furthermore, I focused on each dimension of White's model to guide the interview questions to better understand the complexity of the women's experiences. Additionally, my study was unique to White's model in that it was the first to date that used the model to explore the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors. Brunet et al. (2013) suggested that researchers use White's model for breast cancer and body image research since the model focuses on the multidimensionality of body image and does not limit the understanding of breast cancer survivors' body image experiences. Thus, this research contributes to White's model since it provides a practical example of how body image experiences can be understood by breast cancer survivors.

White's (2000) model also emphasized the importance of using a social constructivist perspective when studying cancer patients' experiences. This approach is consistent with Blood's (2005) emphasis on the need to include opportunities for women to be able voice their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviours on their body image experiences in research. Furthermore, Blood (2005) has stated that body image is not a "consistent and stable construct" (p.132), and that women can become aware of the changes that occur over time and subsequently interpret their body image experiences in a positive manner. It was important for me to recognize that body image experiences are complex and dynamic, and that women should not be pressured to focus on one dimension of body image. I addressed this concern by focusing on the broader dimensions of body image in the women's stories. I facilitated the women's narratives of their body image experiences, which added to the social constructivist literature since there is a lack of research on body image and breast cancer survivors that encourages them to voice their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviours (Brunet et al., 2013). Additionally, my research highlighted that the women were able to accept body-related changes from cancer, which led to overall positive body image experiences. For the women, camaraderie was a key finding that informed their body image experiences in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k, which led to choice of conceptual frameworks in Study 2 to represent camaraderie.

Study 2 informed Weiss's model of social provisions (1974) in two ways. First, Holland and Holahan (2003) were the first to use the model of social provisions in breast cancer survivor research, showing the model to be applicable for breast cancer survivors.

However, I took this one step further and employed the model to breast cancer survivors participating in dragon boating. There is no known research that has explored social provisions in breast cancer survivors and physical activity. Study 2 showed perceived social support in the context of dragon boating as positive breast cancer experiences that contributed to the understanding of social provisions as part of the women's camaraderie experiences. Second, Holland and Holahan (2003) found four provisions in their study (e.g., attachment, reassurance of worth, social integration, and guidance), while Study 2 in my dissertation supported five of the social provisions: social integration (shared breast cancer and dragon boat experiences), attachment (friendship), opportunity for nurturance (common bond), and reassurance of self-worth (encouragement and support), and guidance (knowledge and information). Study 2 further informed Holland and Holahan's (2003) work demonstrating the provision of opportunity for nurturance (common bond) to be relevant to the social support of breast cancer survivors involved in dragon boating. Researchers have shown common bond to be important to breast cancer survivors in dragon boating, since it represents the shared experiences and guidance among the women, enabling them to move beyond their breast cancer experiences (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Unruh & Elvin, 2005). In sum, Study 2 supported five social provisions, which demonstrated perceived social support in the women's camaraderie experiences.

Study 2 informed cohesion by providing depth to the four components of cohesion: Individual Attractions to the Group-Task, Individual Attractions to the Group-Social, Group Integration-Task, and Group Integration-Social. Cohesion is multidimensional and consists of group and individual perceptions: group integration and individual attraction (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1985). Group integration represented the women's perceptions of their team (e.g., sense of belonging and common bond). Individual attraction consisted of the women's individual attractions to the team (e.g., team goal "life after breast cancer" and social relationships). Furthermore, task and social cohesion developed from the women's focus on their team goal and social relationships in their camaraderie experiences. It was apparent that dragon boating was a cohesive environment for the women to move beyond their breast cancer experiences, feel a sense of belonging, discover a common bond, and form social relationships. Overall, the findings collected contributed to the initial stages of establishing a

conceptual framework for camaraderie to better understand the camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors and dragon boating.

#### **4.4 Contrasts between Study 1 and Study 2**

There were contrasts between Study 1 and Study 2 in endurance sports studied, methodologies, and methods used. First, throughout my entire dissertation I defined endurance sport as an acute bout of exercise that requires stamina for a period of time (Houtkeeper, 2002; Katch, McArdle, & Katch, 2011). For example, dragon boating consists of stamina that is required to complete 500 (approximately 2-4 minutes) to 2000m (approximately 9-12 minutes) races, while CIBC Run for the Cure 5k is a running event that consists of stamina exceeding 10 minutes. In Study 1, I focused on CIBC Run for the Cure 5k, an endurance sport different than dragon boating, further demonstrating diversity in the breast cancer literature. CIBC Run for the Cure 5k is a yearly running event in Canada specifically for breast cancer survivors (CIBC, 2013) and adds diversity to the literature since no known research has explored breast cancer survivors' experiences participating in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. I chose CIBC Run for the Cure 5k because it allowed me the opportunity to explore the women's body image experiences in another type of endurance sport associated with breast cancer. Since little is known about other endurance sports associated with breast cancer beyond dragon boating, it is important to compare different endurance sports to better understand the experiences of breast cancer survivors and their participation (Burke & Sabiston, 2010). More specifically, breast cancer survivors' experiences in endurance sports may be shaped by the surgeries and treatments they undergo for breast cancer (McDonough et al., 2008). Furthermore, researchers have shown that breast cancer survivors experience a positive body image in dragon boating (McDonough et al., 2008; Sabiston et al., 2007); therefore, I wanted to explore CIBC Run for the Cure 5k to see if the event supported similar positive body image experiences for breast cancer survivors. More specifically, I wanted to better understand how CIBC Run for the Cure 5k facilitated positive body image experiences for breast cancer survivors and their quality of life. Additionally, CIBC Run for the Cure 5k provided the women the opportunity to participate in a different endurance sport associated with breast cancer and experience positive body

image experiences in an environment similar to dragon boating. Even though the endurance sports are different in context, the focus remains on breast cancer survivors and the ability to provide hope and promote breast cancer awareness.

There were also contrasts between the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating. First, CIBC Run for the Cure 5k was an annual running event for breast cancer survivors that raised funds for breast cancer awareness. The focus of CIBC Run for the Cure 5k was to bring communities together to raise funds for breast cancer research, spread breast cancer awareness, and celebrate the survivorship of breast cancer survivors. CIBC Run for the Cure 5k is different in these focuses from dragon boating since dragon boat festivals do not typically raise funds for breast cancer research and are open endurance events to other teams besides breast cancer survivors. Second, the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k is sponsored and organized by the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation. Dragon boating is different since numerous organizations and companies host festivals across the world. Third, the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k is a one day race event and offers a 10 week training event prior to race day at local running stores across Canada. The Survivor Clinic consisted of weekly meeting that included training for the race and informational sessions on related topics to running and breast cancer. Fourth, the Survivor Clinic was open to all breast cancer survivors who were interested in participating and did not require a long-term commitment like dragon boating. Some of the women liked that the time commitment for the Survivor Clinic was once a week for 10 weeks and that the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k was a one day race event. The women felt like they had more time for other priorities in their lives with their work and families. Fourth, the Survivor Clinic encouraged breast cancer survivors to participate in the race event regardless of their physical activity level or limitations (e.g., not being able to run because of their knees). The Survivor Clinic offered opportunities for the women to train at their own pace that best suited their needs based on their physical activity level. For example, some of the women preferred to run while others walked because of previous injury or other limitations. This is unique since dragon boating is considered vigorous because of the nature of the paddling sport and requires the use of different muscles and motion than running and walking. Furthermore, it is important to understand different sports like CIBC Run for the Cure 5k since it is different from dragon boating in the

focus of the event, but is important to better understand breast cancer survivors' experiences and their participation in different sports.

Another contrast was the methodologies I used in Study 1 and in Study 2 of my dissertation. In Study 1, I used individual narratives to explore the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. The individual narratives provided opportunities for me to present the themes of the women's stories by offering commonalities that occurred between the women's stories on "*new normal*", *goal setting*, and *camaraderie* that ultimately led to the women's overall body image experiences. Alternatively, the results of Study 2 were presented in the form of collective narratives to explore the camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in a season of dragon boating. Collective narratives were chosen since camaraderie is an important part of breast cancer survivors' experiences in dragon boating (McDonough et al., 2011; Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Unruh & Elvin, 2004), thus emphasizing camaraderie to be a team experience. McAdams (2009) and Riessman (2008) stated that narratives allow participants to talk about events and experiences. In Study 1, the individual narratives provided opportunities for the women to tell stories of breast cancer experiences focusing on their initial cancer diagnosis to present and stories of their past and present body image experiences. Furthermore, the individual narratives provided the women the opportunity to tell talk about their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviours about their body image experiences as women and breast cancer survivors. For the women, the individual narratives provided a sense of purpose for lives that led to understanding their breast cancer and body image experiences (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). After writing the results for Study 1 and reflecting on the women's individual narratives, I decided that the results of Study 2 should be written in the form of collective narratives. Study 1 allowed me to reflect on what I learned from the individual narratives, which represented the voices of the three women and similarities in their breast cancer and body image experiences. Since camaraderie was a team experience, a methodology was needed that focused on a group voice. I decided to focus on a group voice since I used a collaboration of all the women's voices in the collective narratives. As the researcher, I wrote the collective narratives to give the women and their shared experiences a group voice. Richardson (1990) stated that collective stories focus on a group of individuals



and provides readers the opportunity to relate to the stories. Furthermore, no known breast cancer research had used collective narratives, thus creating diversity in the literature. Therefore, I wanted to fill a gap in the literature and write the narratives in a form that highlighted the women's experiences and demonstrated the essence of dragon boating for breast cancer survivors. Since stories are a social phenomenon, the narratives encouraged the women to openly discuss stories of body image and camaraderie, which also clarified the meaning of the events and experiences (Elliot, 2005).

There were also contrasts between the methods used in Study 1 and Study 2. The methods used across Study 1 and Study 2 included individual interviews, focus group interviews, blogging, and creative practice activities. In Study 1 I used individual semi-structured interviews to explore the body image experiences of three breast cancer survivors in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. The individual semi-structured interviews in Study 1 enabled me to ask open-ended questions that captured the essence of each woman's story. During the interviews in Study 1, the women told stories of their body image and breast cancer experiences, and participation in endurance sporting events. In Study 1, the women felt comfortable telling me their stories and reflecting on their past and present body image and breast cancer experiences. Furthermore, Study 1 enabled me to inform specific methods that included conducting individual semi-structured interviews that led to methodological decisions for Study 2. In Study 2, I decided to conduct focus group interviews versus individual semi-structured interviews since the focus group interviews matched the goals of Study 2. Specifically, Study 2 focused on the goals of (1) answering the question *what* are the camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in a season of dragon boating and (2) presenting the findings of Study 2 in a narrative format that best fit the voices of the women. Focus group interviews aligned with the first goal since it focused on the experienced of groups (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Sparkes & Smith, 2014) that best addressed: *what* are the camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in a season of dragon boating. For the second goal, the focus group interviews allowed me capture the women's perspectives of their camaraderie experiences and represent the findings in a format that best fit the voices of the women. Even though there were contrasts in the types of interviews I used in Study 1 (e.g., individual interviews) and Study 2 (e.g., focus group interviews), my

methodological decisions were appropriate to the research design and research questions for Study 1 and Study 2.

Study 1 and Study 2 also consisted of other methods such as blogging and creative practice activities. In Study 1, two of the three women completed blog entries on their body image and breast cancer experiences that occurred during their training and participation in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. Hookway (2008) stated that blogging is a flexible method for participants since it is a convenient and interactive approach for them to journal about their experiences. Two of the women completed entries in their online blogs at least once a week, while the third participant chose not to blog. The two women that completed blogs, included in their entries images, photographs, and quotes related to their body image experiences as breast cancer survivors training and participation in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. The woman that chose not to blog had decided that blogging was not an appropriate activity for her. After reflecting on my research experiences in Study 1, I learned that creative practice activities should be of interest to all the women. Therefore, I asked the women in Study 2 to complete a creative practice activity of their choice, which resulted in a hat-making activity to represent their camaraderie experiences as a team. During the creative practice activity, the women conveyed their thoughts, feelings, and represented their camaraderie experiences while making a camaraderie hat (Ponto et al., 2003). More specifically, the women decorated the hat with pink sequenced fabric, pink breast cancer ribbons, and cutouts of pink figures of people, which represented their team. The women enjoyed making the hat and were proud of their creative artwork that portrayed their camaraderie experiences as a team. In Study 1, blogging provided the women the opportunity to journal virtually and reflect on their experiences in a convenient method that generated modern day knowledge on the Internet (Sullivan, 2005). For Study 2, the hat-making activity enabled the women to create art to conveying their camaraderie experiences (Ponto et al., 2003). Overall, both methods provided the women the opportunity to document their journey of body image, breast cancer, and camaraderie experiences during Survivor Clinic training for the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating.

## 4.5 Limitations

One of the limitations across both studies was sampling bias, as the participants recruited were all Caucasian Canadian women, and hence my research does not include the voices of breast cancer survivors from other ethnicities. This limitation is not unique to my work, in that most other studies conducted on breast cancer survivors and dragon boating encountered similar sampling biases (McDonough et al., 2008; Mitchell, et al., 2007; Sabiston et al., 2007; Parry 2009). The majority of research on breast cancer survivors and dragon boating represent a population of Caucasian, educated, and moderate to high socioeconomic status (McDonough et al., 2008; Sabiston et al., 2007). There is no known research that has adequately explored ethnicity in breast cancer survivors and dragon boating; hence, future studies need to explore race, ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomic status in the experiences of breast cancer survivors involved in dragon boating (Mitchell et al., 2007). Mitchell et al. (2007) stated that ethnicity is important to consider because it shapes women's dragon boating experiences. Burke and Sabiston (2010) also stated that ethnicity may play a role in how dragon boating is experienced by breast cancer survivors. More specifically, the women may interpret their experiences in dragon boating differently because of cultural norms and race. Nonetheless, ethnicity will help researchers better understand the benefits to and experiences of breast cancer survivors involved in dragon boating (Parry, 2008). Given that dragon boating is popular worldwide (Parry, 2008), future research within multiple cultures is needed to highlight the broader understanding of women's body image and camaraderie experiences. To further understand this relationship, research might explore what the women's body image and camaraderie experiences look like, what they consist of, and if they are similar to other breast cancer dragon boat teams. Perhaps, exploring the ethnicity of breast cancer survivors and dragon boating will highlight the voices of women from other cultures and geographic locations to enhance the understanding of breast cancer survivors' body image and camaraderie experiences in dragon boating (Parry, 2009).

A second limitation was a lack of research using narratives as a methodology that I could use to guide my own research. There is limited narrative research available on breast cancer survivors and dragon boating since the majority of studies have used other

methodologies, (e.g., phenomenology). Since there is paucity on narrative research, breast cancer survivors and dragon boating, the literature offers limited data on narratives to draw upon. To address this limitation, I engaged in a multi-step process with my doctoral supervisor and came to a decision as to how to present the narratives. In Study 1, I used a collaboration of several different studies from the body image and breast cancer literature to guide my findings. I spent time reading articles that used narratives to gain a sense of how the stories were written using an individual character's voice and narrative components. After reflecting on the studies, I brainstormed potential ideas for writing my findings, which led to having the women's individual stories integrated into the themes of Study 1. For Study 2, I reflected on the narrative components suggested by Oliver (1998) and Riessman (2008) (i.e., character, plot, setting, and events) and how each component would be portrayed in my stories. Thus, the collective narratives resulted in nonfictional stories that respected and represented the women's camaraderie experiences. Furthermore, a fictional character approach in qualitative research provides researchers with the opportunity to represent their participants as characters (Given, 2008; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). After reflecting on how to write the women's camaraderie experiences, I decided that one fictional character would best represent the women's collective voices. The fictional character-based approach provided me with the opportunity to use a dialogue that supported the voices of all the women and their stories (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002). Furthermore, the fictional character-based approach allowed me to address my concerns about participants' information that may have otherwise been identifiable. By expanding the use of narrative research in the breast cancer literature, it would be helpful and beneficial for future researchers to have more available data to guide their research and discuss the significance of their findings directly to the breast cancer literature.

A third limitation was the scheduling of the interviews over the course of four months for Study 1 and six months for Study 2. Scheduling the interviews was challenging for the women due to issues with their work and family schedules and for me since I was scheduling the interviews. To address this limitation, I was flexible in the scheduling process of the interviews and the creative practice activity. Flexibility is important in qualitative research since it allows researchers to make changes and

modifications to their research design (Holloway & Todres, 2003). Sparkes and Smith (2014) stated that changes to research design may include strategies for collecting data since it occurs concurrently. For example, some of the modifications that I made to my research design were providing the women the freedom to schedule the interviews and activities based on their availability. Regardless, the women in Study 1 and Study 2 and I had difficulty scheduling dates and times for the interviews and activities. More specifically, I was able to change and modify the scheduling of the interviews and activities for the women depending on their availability. Furthermore, flexibility allowed me to collect sufficient data in a timely manner that was convenient for the women. Based on the collaborative effort of the women and I, we completed the interviews and activities in a timely manner that led to the emergence of data that answered the research questions. Despite my efforts to come up with possible approaches to avoid this limitation, future researchers should consider methodological decisions on scheduling issues when conducting research.

A fourth limitation consisted of excluding some of the women's stories in my dissertation. In Study 1, participant recruitment consisted of previous experience running races and running the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012. I may have excluded some of the other women's body image experiences because I chose to focus only on women running and not on women walking the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. First, I chose running because the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k focused on running as the endurance sport and the Survivor Clinic provided specific training to run the 5k. Second, since I was a runner myself, I was interested in training alongside the women and exploring their body image experiences while training and running the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. However to address this limitation, I could have recruited other breast cancer survivors that walked the event and also explored their body image experiences while training and walking the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. This could have demonstrated similarities and differences in the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors running or walking the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. However, I chose to focus only on running and exploring the body image experiences of three breast cancer survivors in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k.

For Study 2, I provided all 30 of the women on the dragon boating team the opportunity to participate. However, some of the women were interested in participating, but could not attend interviews or activities because of scheduling issues; and some of the other women were not interested in participating at all. Prior to Study 2, I presented the women with the purpose of the study as well as the research process in a manner so that the women did not feel like they had to partake in my research project. Overall, Study 2 consisted of 16 participants with a core group of 11 women that attended all the focus group interviews and the creative practice activity. Since not all 30 of the women were able to participate, some of the voices of the women were excluded from the camaraderie narratives. I addressed this limitation by writing the camaraderie narratives in a way that most accurately represented the research process and was respectful to the women that participated in my studies. In addition, I did not include any elements of the story that would be unique to the women who did not participate for confidentiality reasons. More specifically, I wanted to ensure that the descriptions of the women's stories were adequately told and were reflective of their experiences while still maintaining confidentiality. I accomplished this by creating a fictional character that could potentially be a member on the team that told the women's stories from a first person perspective.

Aspects of the women's experiences may have been excluded in both studies since the interview guides tended to focus more on positive experiences that may have prompted the women to answer the questions with positive responses. Example interview questions from Study 1 included: *"Explain the importance of "Run for the Cure 5k" and what affect it may have on your body"*? and Study 2: *"Why do you think that the breast cancer community has centered events for breast cancer survivors around endurance sports?"*. During the interviews, the women discussed their positive body image and camaraderie experiences in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating and rarely discussed some of the negative experiences that they might have had from participation. This is not to say that the women did not have any negative experiences from participation, but the women may have chosen not to discuss these experiences because of the positive phrasing I used in the interview questions, relevancy, or for other personal reasons. However, it is possible that some of the women may have had negative

experiences with dragon boating and CIBC Run for the Cure 5k, but those stories were not discussed since my interviews guides focused primarily on the positive experiences of the women. However, it is important to acknowledge that environments such as dragon boating and CIBC Run for the Cure 5k may not all be positive experiences for breast cancer survivors. In Sabiston's et al. study (2007), the researchers found that participating in dragon boating can be challenging for some of the women because of the emphasis on breast cancer and possible reoccurrence. More specifically, dragon boating reminded the women that they were survivors; but some of the women chose not to embrace the survivor identity, which led to the possibly of leaving the team. Furthermore, McDonough et al. (2011) stated that breast cancer survivors may have negative experiences in dragon boating that may led to issues in social support, social relationships, and posttraumatic growth. Therefore, further research is needed to explore the negative experiences of breast cancer survivors participating in dragon boating and how these challenges may shape their interest in continuing to participate or their decision to leave the team. In addition, exploring the potential barriers of dragon boating that may create negative experiences for breast cancer survivors would provide insight into the challenges that occur and how the establishment of potential coping strategies may lead to overcoming the barriers and participation in dragon boating.

Second, endurance sporting events is also unique since it requires physical movement that produces many physical and psychological benefits for breast cancer survivors. Some of the physical and psychological benefits include: improved aerobic capacity, muscular strength, body image, quality of life with decreases in anxiety and depression (Brunet et al., 2011; Schmitz, 2011; McDonough et al., 2008). In addition, dragon boating requires physical exertion that is needed to execute the physical movement of paddling (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002). Furthermore, Unruh and Elvin (2004) found that the women focused more on their physical abilities when dragon boating to helped them overcome their limitations from breast cancer surgeries and treatments. In addition, the women were less likely to focus on physical appearance since dragon boating was a vigorous sport that required emphasis on their physical capabilities to participate in dragon boating (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Unruh & Elvin, 2004). Overall, further research is needed to better understand the role that physical

activity and other contexts play in breast cancer survivors' experiences. Thus, providing breast cancer survivors opportunities to engage in physical activity and other contexts that are of interest to them may facilitate enjoyment, social support, purpose, confidence, and enhance their quality of life (Courneya, Mackey, & McKenzie, 2002).

#### **4.6 Future Directions**

Findings from Study 1 and Study 2 can be used to inform future research on breast cancer, body image, camaraderie, and endurance sports. The first recommendation is exploring the body image and camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in the context of various sporting environments. Researchers have shown that breast cancer survivors are engaging in other physical activities and sports (e.g., cycling, golfing, kayaking, running, and walking) after gaining confidence by participating in dragon boating (McDonough et al., 2008). Providing breast cancer survivors opportunities to participate in a variety of sports that are of interest to them would facilitate enjoyment, social support, purpose, confidence, and challenges (Courneya, Mackey, & McKenzie, 2002). Furthermore, exploring different sports would highlight the benefits of physical activity for breast cancer survivors that are reluctant to participate in running and dragon boating (Schmitz, 2011). More specifically, the women may be more likely adhere to physical activity guidelines if they had a variety of sports to choose from (Schmitz, 2011). Exploring different sports would allow researchers to compare perspectives and experiences of sports to better understand how sports participation can promote breast cancer survivors' physical activity adherence, physical and psychological benefits of physical activity, and quality of life (Brunet et al., 2011; Courneya, Mackey, & McKenzie, 2002). Additionally, exploring the body image and camaraderie of breast cancer survivors in different sporting contexts would also provide findings that may be similar or different to the body image and camaraderie experiences found in dragon boating. This would provide insight into the complexity of the breast cancer survivors' body image and camaraderie experiences and how breast cancer survivors can experience similar benefits found in dragon boating from their participation in different sports



Hopefully, future researchers will strive to explore the body image and camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in different sports to further understand how these constructs play a role in the women's quality of life and sports participation.

Another future research direction would be to further explore the body image and camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors involved in sports. Body image is multidimensional, and all dimensions are part of breast cancer survivors' social experiences (McDonough et al., 2008; Sabiston et al., 2007). Researchers have shown that breast cancer survivors focus more on their physical capabilities than appearance-related qualities when participating in physical activity (McDonough et al., 2008; Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002; Sabiston et al., 2007; Unruh & Elvin, 2004). For example, the women in my studies demonstrated that they focused more on their physical capabilities than appearance since camaraderie was the central force enabling them to accept their bodies as a result of breast cancer surgeries and treatments. Furthermore, camaraderie led the women to overcome some of their body-related changes from breast cancer surgeries and treatments. Thus, one of the greatest contributions for body image research is to provide breast cancer survivors the opportunity to participate in physical activity and sports for the camaraderie and positive body image experiences. Since we have a limited understanding of the body image and camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors involved in sports, researchers should further explore these constructs in depth. It is important to further understand the role that camaraderie plays in the breast cancer survivors' body image experiences and how their sports participation provides opportunities for positive body image experiences. Thus, more research is needed to understand how camaraderie from sports participation can best promote positive body image for breast cancer survivors.

A third future direction is needed to further explore how we can expand the participation of dragon boating for breast cancer survivors that may be limited due to socioeconomic status, cost, and access. First, most of the research on breast cancer survivors and dragon boating has been conducted in Canada, and predominately with Caucasian women of middle to upper socioeconomic status (McDonough et al., 2008; Sabiston et al., 2007). Since research has focused on the many physical, psychological, and social benefits of dragon boating for breast cancer survivors (McDonough et al.,

2008; McKenzie, 1998; Parry, 2008), it is particularly important to help breast cancer survivors and their participation in dragon boating to improve quality of life. Lower socioeconomic status might limit breast cancer survivors' participation in dragon boating because of membership and travel costs for most dragon boat teams. More specifically, joining a dragon boat team requires membership costs that include coaches, equipment (e.g., boat, lifejackets, paddles), and dock facilities. Second, breast cancer survivors may be limited in their participation opportunities because of the geographic location. Dragon boating is an international sport and is becoming more popular (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2002); however, not all cities, especially ones located in rural communities, are likely to have dragon boat teams. More specifically, there are over 100 breast cancer dragon boat teams in the world, but there are only 50 teams in Canada and 38 in the U.S. (International Breast Cancer Paddler's Commission, 2013), which prohibits many breast cancer survivors from participating in dragon boating. Powell and colleagues (2006) have stated that individuals are less likely to engage in physical activity when residing in rural or less populated locations. Therefore, as researchers it is important to provide breast cancer survivors the opportunity to participate in dragon boating since research has shown that there are many physical and psychological benefits of dragon boating for breast cancer survivors (Brunet et al., 2011; McDonough et al., 2008; Pinto & Maruyama, 1999; Schmitz, 2011).

To address this limitation, I recommend educating communities, health and recreational departments and organizations to consider ways of reducing individual membership costs and access to dragon boating, so that more breast cancer survivors can have the opportunities to participate. As researchers, we can provide knowledge and awareness of breast cancer and physical activity in the community that would eliminate some of the challenges and resources that are currently limiting to breast cancer survivors and their participation in dragon boating (Anderson, Shyyan, Eniu, Smith, Yip, & Bese et al., 2005). An important step in this process would consist of contacting national and local organizations and corporations and asking if they would be interested in sponsoring breast cancer dragon boat teams. Currently, to the best of my knowledge, there are breast cancer dragon boat teams in the U.S. and Canada that are sponsored by companies and organizations that donate funds to the team to reduce costs for membership, facilities, and

travel. Yancey and colleagues (2007) suggested that contacting organizations and corporations is one approach that can lead to other possible opportunities to support breast cancer survivors' participation in dragon boating. Furthermore, McGinnis, Williams-Russo, and Knickman, (2002) noted that the implementation and procedures of health policy changes vary depending on the location and country. This is important to keep in mind when contacting local and national organizations and corporations for sponsorships and other potential opportunities to facilitate participation opportunities for breast cancer survivors and dragon boating. Nonetheless, the development of networks and relationships between organizations, corporations, researchers, and breast cancer dragon boat teams would initiate sponsorship and support that would allow opportunities for breast cancer survivors to participate in dragon boating regardless of social limitations.

A fourth future direction consists of exploring how the movement of water can play a positive role in shaping breast cancer survivors' experiences. Kaplan (2001) found that environments such as water and other natural landscape facilitate feelings of tranquility, relaxation, and rejuvenation for breast cancer survivors. English, Wilson, and Keller-Olaman (2008) found water to have healing properties for breast cancer survivors and was viewed as therapeutic, calming, and relaxing. Similarly in my research, the women stated that paddling in the water facilitated feelings of comfort, calmness, rejuvenation, relaxation, and physical exertion. More specifically, the water helped them to relieve stress through the physical exertion of paddling and appreciate the natural landscapes that produced calmness and relaxation. For the women, calmness and relaxation occurred from the views of the sun setting, the trees and other natural landscapes, and the calmness of the water. To date, there is no known research that has explored the movement of the water in breast cancer survivors and dragon boating. Since we have a limited understanding of how the movement of water may play a positive role in shaping breast cancer survivors' experiences, researchers should further explore this in depth. It is important to further understand the role that the movement of water can play in the breast cancer survivors' experiences and how environments and landscapes such as water can provide opportunities for recovery and healing processes from breast cancer. Thus, more research is needed to understand how the movement of water and other

therapeutic environments can provide opportunities for recovery and healing and best enhance quality of life for breast cancer survivors.

Lastly, future research on breast cancer survivors and physical activity needs to diversify in its use of qualitative methodologies. Several of the dragon boat studies have used phenomenology (McDonough et al., 2008; Sabiston et al., 2007), participatory research (Mitchell et al., 2007), and feminist theory (Parry, 2008, 2009). However, other types of qualitative research (e.g., case study, photo voice, ethnography, etc.) (Creswell, 2009) are absent from the present literature. Different types of qualitative methodologies are important because they seek to explore the understanding and meaning of individuals using different approaches (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The different approaches are useful in terms of meaning and understanding since each approach has a specific focus that aligns with the phenomenon being explored (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Furthermore, different qualitative methodologies may be more appropriate for a study depending on the research question and phenomenon explored (Creswell, 2009). Perhaps a research study is focused on exploring the culture of a breast cancer survivor dragon boat team.

Therefore, ethnography would be an appropriate methodology since the researcher is interested in studying the culture and the shared experiences of a breast cancer survivor dragon boat team (Lincoln & Guba, 2002). For example, ethnographic approaches might provide additional insight into the social environment of a breast cancer survivor team and provide a purposeful and thorough description of the team's culture, behaviours, motivations, and beliefs of those women involved in dragon boating (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Furthermore, future research should use different qualitative methodologies when exploring the experiences of breast cancer survivors and dragon boating to provide insight on the unique perspectives of each methodology in understanding social phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Sparkes and Smith (2014) suggested that different approaches provide new and innovative ways to present findings that form meaning and interpretations from participants' experiences. Additionally, Smith (2010) has stated that interviews are the most common method for data collection but that different approaches should be used to collect data. In Study 1, I used blogging to collect data on two of the three women's body image experiences. Blogging provided insight into the women's body image experiences over a period of ten weeks as they trained for

the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k. As another example, in Study 2, data was collected from the creative practice hat-making activity that contributed to the overall camaraderie experiences of the women. Furthermore, creative practices activities are a visual representation of the women's experiences and can provide additional information on meaning and understanding to enrich our knowledge (Janesick, 2007). The hat-making activity visually represented how the women described their camaraderie experiences with their teammates in dragon boating. Moreover, the hat-making activity further provided knowledge on the women's camaraderie experiences as they described the objects and materials they used to represent camaraderie, which offered additional insight and meaning that emerged in the data. Lastly, different qualitative methods have allowed me to explore the breast cancer survivors' body image and camaraderie experiences in a form of creative expression, which spoke to the women involved in both studies in a fashion that has expanded our understanding of their body image and camaraderie experiences, and cancer survivorship.

#### **4.7 Reflection on the role of my research to physical activity and other contexts**

It is important to highlight how the role of my research is unique to physical activity and other contexts. My research demonstrated that camaraderie is a motivating force that facilitated the women's positive body image experiences in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating. Similarly, art therapy has been another context that has been of interest to women with breast cancer and has improved their body image (Svensk, Oster, Thyme, Magnusson, Eiseman et al., 2009; Oster, Svensk, Magnusson, Thyme, Sjodin, et al., 2006). Art therapy has been defined as "a mind-body intervention in supporting the power of the mind to influence the body in ways that encourage and stimulate health and well-being" (Malchiodi 1999, p. 17). Svensk (2009) conducted a study on art therapy and women with breast cancer. In Svensk's (2009) study, the women were provided various art materials (e.g., paint, paper, tape, pencils.) to express their cancer experiences over a period of five weeks. Findings showed improved body image and quality of life with decreases in stress, anxiety, and depression. Like physical activity, art therapy may provide the women with an outlet to express their body image and breast cancer experiences. First, art therapy allows the women to engage in an

activity that may be best suited to their individual needs. For example, painting may be an approach for the women that they find best to relieve stress and facilitate their recovery from breast cancer. Painting may provide the women opportunities to create images that speak to how they feel about their body-related changes from cancer, which in turn may act as a coping resource for them to have positive body image experiences. Second, art therapy may allow the women to focus on “life after breast cancer” similar to that of physical activity. More specifically, painting or other art approaches may provide the women with a focus point on engaging in the activity that deemphasizes the focus on cancer. Like art therapy, Mitchell and Nielsen (2002) found that dragon boating also provided an escape for women to accept their cancer diagnosis while still being able to fight for their physical and emotional health, thus creating “life after breast cancer”.

Even though art therapy may be similar to physical activity contexts, endurance sporting events associated with breast cancer might be unique in two ways. First in my studies, camaraderie allowed the women to focus on their physical capabilities, accept their bodies, and create positive overall body image experiences. More specifically, the women’s shared experiences in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating led to the development of social support and cohesion that created positive body image experiences for the women. Furthermore, the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating also provided comfortable and safe environments for the women to receive information on their body-related changes from cancer. The women were able to share and understand one another’s body image experiences throughout their training for the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating since they frequently engaged in verbal discussions on reconstruction options, side effects of surgeries and treatments, and physical appearance. McDonough et al. (2007) and Sabiston et al. (2008) also found dragon boating to be a comfortable and safe environment for the women to share and understand each other’s body image experiences. Given that CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating were comfortable and safe environments, camaraderie allowed the women to accept their bodies because of the shared breast cancer experience, support, and common bond from other breast cancer survivors. It is important to note that it is possible for

camaraderie to be developed in other contexts such as art therapy; however there is no known research to date that has explored this construct in other contexts.

#### **4.8 Reflection on my role as coach**

It is important to highlight my role as a dragon boat coach and some of the challenges and considerations I faced with my research. First, when there was any conflict within the group, I would let the women work things out for themselves unless it was interfering with practice. I then emphasized to the women that we needed to focus on the task at hand (e.g., paddling or working out) and they could resume their conversation after practice. I also understood that some of the women had been members of the team for a long period of time and just did not get along with some of the other women, so out of respect I never forced the women to have conversations or participate with another woman whom had conflict with to avoid confrontation and respect for the women and the team. However, these instances were rare and few and far between. Second, my role as a researcher and a coach was at times challenging for the women because I needed to be clear which role I was playing. The dual roles were particularly challenging at times to some of the women when I was conducting Study 2. More specifically, at preseason practices I would be coaching the women on technique in their weight training and then the next minute walking around taking notes. During these times, I was constantly changing between coaching and taking notes, therefore causing the women to sometimes potentially wonder whether I was a coach or researcher at practice. However, to offset this challenge, prior to the start of data collection and throughout Study 2, I emphasized the purpose of my dual role as researcher and coach to the women and continued to talk to the women about my dual roles establishing clarity and purpose for the women during the remainder of data collection. Aoyagia and Portenga (2010) stated that multiple relationships can be complex, but are not considered unethical because they do not necessarily create a violation of boundaries. However, they suggested that it is important to maintain appropriate boundaries and reflect ethically on each situation and experience that arises to ensure ethical principles are intact. Reflection is also another consideration emphasized by Rogerson and colleagues (2011), they stated that reflection demonstrates competency since it allows for expression of potential biases,

rational thinking, and conflicts of interest. I did my best to follow these suggested ethical considerations by being knowledgeable of my boundaries as a researcher and a coach, stating my biases in my reflexivity (See Chapter 1 Reflexivity) and field notes throughout my studies, as well as engage in ethical conversations with my doctoral supervisor to ensure professionalism and competency was achieved throughout my dissertation.

Third, when I first started coaching the women I was concerned about them taking me seriously because of my inexperience of dragon boating and the gap in our age differences. There were times when I first starting coaching the women where a couple of the women may have not taken me seriously because I was a young woman in my twenties that did not have breast cancer and had never dragon boated. During this time, I did my best to build trust and rapport with the women as well as demonstrate my interest in learning more about the sport of dragon boating, their body image and breast cancer experiences as women and breast cancer survivors, as well as my knowledge of fitness and health as a kinesiology professional. Once the women got to know me personally they were more receptive to my willingness to learn and the knowledge and experiences that I had to help them to the best of my ability. However, this experience really reinforced the value of my spending prolonged time in the field with the women in both studies.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

According to statistics, there are 2.5 million breast cancer survivors in the United States, and approximately 153,000 breast cancer survivors in Canada (ACS, 2012; CCS, 2012). Physical activity has been suggested to increase survival rates, improve body image, and decrease risk of mortality for breast cancer (Schmitz, 2011). Furthermore, interest in endurance sporting events associated with breast cancer such as dragon boating and running have recently risen among breast cancer survivors (Parry, 2009; CBCF, 2012). Therefore, the goal of this dissertation was to explore the body image and camaraderie experiences of breast cancer survivors in endurance sporting events. Study 1 and Study 2 found that body image and camaraderie are important components to breast cancer survivors' participation in endurance sporting events. My research suggests that additional research is needed to further understand the body image and camaraderie



experiences of breast cancer survivors involved in endurance sporting events. My dissertation contributes to the literature by highlighting camaraderie as a motivating force that created overall positive body image experiences for the women. More specifically, CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon created comfortable and safe environments that allowed the women to focus their physical capabilities, accept their bodies, and create overall body image experiences. Furthermore, my findings showed that breast cancer survivors experience positive body image experiences from participation in CIBC Run for the Cure 5k and dragon boating similar other women who participate in sports. Overall, Study 1 and Study 2 demonstrated that endurance sports are important for breast cancer survivors because they provided the women opportunities for positive body image experiences and a purpose in life following breast cancer diagnosis.

## Chapter V

### 5.1 Epilogue “Let it Ride”

I continue to reflect on the journey that I had with the many women who participated in my research. “*Let it ride*” is a command in dragon boating that is used to stop paddling and resume at rest. I used this term as a metaphor to represent the end of my journey with these women. As the formal phase of my research came to an end, the women celebrated our journey by throwing me a surprise going away party. I received countless hugs, gifts, pictures, memories, love, support, and encouragement from the women on the dragon boat team. The women taught me many things about life; and perhaps rubbed some of their wisdom off on me. During our time together, the women became like mothers and grandmothers to me and were always there for me when I needed someone to talk too or an extra push to persevere through life in general (and my doctoral program). I will forever hold all the memories and experiences that we had together close to my heart.

At the beginning of my research journey (See Chapter 1 Reflexivity), I discussed some of my own body image experiences and involvement in endurance sports. As a researcher, it was important for me to address these issues from my own perspective, since they shaped my experiences of my research. Sylvia Blood (2005) stated “women are encouraged to learn about body image and to learn about themselves” (p.2). During the research process, I was continuously learning about other women’s body image experiences, largely through their stories of camaraderie; but little did I know that I was also learning about myself and my own body image experiences. Allowing myself to learn about the women’s body images experiences has helped me develop a greater understanding of how I have overcome my own body image struggles. One of the other most valuable and intriguing experiences that I take away from my dissertations is that running is no longer my favorite endurance sport. Dragon boating is now that favorite. As a researcher, it is amazing to look back at my dissertation and see how the women’s experiences had shaped my own body image experiences, involvement in endurance sports, and helped transform me into the person that I have become today.

After completing both studies, I can now say that I have had a first-hand look into the breast cancer survivors' body image and camaraderie experiences in endurance sporting events. Researching the women's body image experiences constantly had me learning, thinking, and talking about body image with them as we trained and competed in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k, as well as during numerous dragon boat practices and festivals. My many conversations with them led to stories that were both insightful and inspiring, particularly those in which they talked about their struggles as breast cancer survivors and how the camaraderie found in endurance sports was crucial to their social experiences and breast cancer survivorship.

Some of the struggles that the women faced as a result of breast cancer consisted of scarring from surgeries, hair loss from chemotherapy, wearing prostheses, possible side effects of medication such as weight gain, limitations of lymphedema, and pros and cons of reconstruction surgery. Hearing their stories taught me that the women participate in endurance sports, such as dragon boating and CIBC Run for the Cure 5k, to share some of these similar struggles and experiences with other breast cancer survivors, in addition to being physically active. Camaraderie was important to the women because it brought them a sense of belonging, a unspoken knowing that they knew what one another was going through, and that they were there for each other as they all strived to overcome their struggles and promote "life after breast cancer". The women referred to dragon boating and CIBC Run for the Cure 5k as a natural and supportive environments for them to express their experiences that led to accepting their bodies and created overall positive body image experiences. In my discussions with the women, it became clear that the women accepted their bodies because they learned that there is more to life than just physical appearance, including scars from surgery, losing a breast(s), wearing prostheses, gaining weight from medication, and undergoing reconstruction surgery. For the women, accepting their body-related changes from cancer enabled them to move forward with their lives and focus on living life to the fullest since surviving breast cancer; meaning that the women focused their lives on being physically active, having fun, being healthy, and providing hope and breast cancer awareness to other breast cancer survivors and women. I will always remember the strength and confidence that the women showed me

to have in myself as well as the laughter that was always present, hugs that were constantly given, and their camaraderie experiences that I was fortunate to be apart of.

After I had completed the data collection for the two studies of my research, I moved back home to Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas to finish writing my dissertation. Since I enjoyed being involved in dragon boating in particular, I subsequently decided to become a paddler by joining Dallas United Crew (DUC) Delites, a local competitive dragon boat team. Since joining DUC I have learned even more that camaraderie and the sporting environment of dragon boating plays a powerful role in facilitating positive body image experiences.

Dragon boating is a sport that accepts different body shapes and body types and is more focused on physical capability and effort. This first changed my thinking about my own body image when I first started attending dragon boat festivals with the women in my research. I remember watching the competitive teams race and realizing the physical exertion that it took to race at that level. Once joining DUC, I soon experienced what it was like to be a paddler on a competitive team. Dragon boating taught me that strength and power is needed to stay in sync as well as the momentum you need to move the boat. I began to focus my workouts on weight lifting sessions that helped me be a stronger paddler and improve my reach on paddling strokes. I put more effort into fueling my body properly for workouts, paddling practice, and competition. Dragon boating helped me focus more on performance than just aesthetics and appearance; it has helped me change my negative mindset about my body that I had since I was 15 years old to a more positive and appreciative mindset. I now appreciate my body for sustaining the intensity of paddling during two hour practices and the amount of weight that I can lift deadlift and squat. I no longer care about how much I weigh because I never step on the scale. You can almost always find me eating every two hours and eating all the food in the house. There are times that I wish I could go back in time and tell myself at 15 and 16 years old that appearance and how much you weigh is not everything because at the end of the day all that matters is how you feel physically and mentally. It has taken me a long time to accept my body for what it can do, and I believe that the women and the camaraderie from DUC has facilitated these positive body image experiences for me.

Completing my dissertation has open many doors for me personally and professionally. I plan to continue making a difference in breast cancer survivors' lives by co-founding and coaching the Pink DUCS, the first breast cancer survivor dragon boat team in Dallas/Fort Worth. While Pink DUCS is in its infancy, I also plan to continue research on breast cancer survivors and endurance sports. None of these opportunities would be possible without the women whom participated in my dissertation. I continue to thank the women for helping me realize the passion that I have for the sport of dragon boating and inspiring and encouraging me to join a dragon boat team and become a paddler. It is because of the women that I now want to become a better paddler and now have the potential to make Dragon boat USA! I am grateful that I made a difference in their lives as much as they did in mine.

While my role of coach may have ended, the ride with the team never will.

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## **Appendices**

## APPENDIX A: Consent Form



### ***Body Image, Breast Cancer Survivorship, & Endurance Sport***

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled **Narratives of Body Image Among Breast Cancer Survivors as Endurance Athletes in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k Race**. Please read this form carefully, and **feel free to email or call the researchers with any questions** you might have.

#### **Researchers:**

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**Purpose and Procedure:** The purpose of this study is to explore breast cancer survivors' body image experiences as endurance athletes. Body image is defined as one's thoughts, beliefs, feelings, behaviours, perceptions, and attitudes about one's appearance (Cash, 2004). In addition to better understand body image experiences in endurance sports among breast cancer survivors, this study will provide insight to the experiences of body image that breast cancer survivors may encounter while participating in an endurance sport/event such as the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation CIBC Run for the Cure 5k race.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you do choose to become involved, your participation will be required for six weeks. As a participant, you are required to register and attend all *Survivor Clinic* sessions for the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation (CIBC) Run for the Cure race held by the *Running Room* in Saskatoon, SK and complete the 5k race, on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012 with the researcher (i.e., Katie Maciulewicz). During the six weeks, you will create an online blog and provide weekly entries after each *Survivor Clinic* session about your experiences with body image as an endurance athlete and breast cancer survivor participating in this event. You will be provided instructions and details on blogging prior to the start of the *Survivor Clinic* sessions starting on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012. Two one-one interviews will be held with Katie Maciulewicz that will last an estimated 45-60 minutes. The first interview will be

completed prior to the *Survivor Clinic* session and the second interview will be conducted after the completion of the CIBC Run for the Cure on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012. Discussions in the interviews will include topics such as breast cancer survivorship, body image, physical activity and sports, and Run for the Cure 5k race. Both interviews will be conducted at a time that is convenient for you in the Physical Activity Complex at the University of Saskatchewan, and will be led by a the researcher (i.e., Katie Maciulewicz).

Both interviews will be audiotaped, and field notes may be taken. The audiotapes will be transcribed (written out) word for word in order for the research team to review what was said and develop themes.

**Potential Benefits:** Although no benefits of participating in this study can be guaranteed, there is the potential for participation to provide the opportunity for an increased understanding about body image among breast cancer survivors as endurance athletes. No research to date has been conducted on narratives of body image in breast cancer survivors as endurance athletes.

**Potential Risks:** There are no known or anticipated physical or psychological risks associated with participating in this study. You have the right to refuse to answer any question, at which point the discussion will be redirected. Not answering a question or withdrawing from the study will result in no penalty to you or anyone else. Although we do not expect any psychological risk, if we feel participation is placing you under undue stress (e.g., establishing mutual times for interview sessions) we will discontinue your involvement in the study, again resulting in no penalty. You are encouraged to contact the researchers at any time (before, during, or after the study) to ask any questions that you may have. In the event that you would like to further discuss your feelings regarding the issues discussed in the study, Saskatoon Mental Health Services can assist you:

Mental Health Services - services available to the public, no fee

Phone # 655-7950

- Adult Mental Health Services (for adults 19 years and older)

**Storage of Data:** All research material will be stored securely in the office of Dr. Kent Kowalski at the University of Saskatchewan. Only the researchers will have access to the data. The data will be stored for a minimum of five years after completion of the study. This is standard protocol for any data that may be published in an academic journal and/or presented at a professional conference.

**Confidentiality:** The data from the study will be used as part of the student researcher's Doctoral dissertation, as well as to produce a manuscript in hopes of publishing in a scholarly journal and/or being presented at a conference. However, *your identity* will be kept confidential. Although we might report direct quotations from the interviews, you will be asked to choose a pseudonym (made up name) and all identifying information (name, school, address, etc.) will be removed from our report. Only the research team will review the original audiotapes and transcripts. Names or other identifying information will not be discussed or made public outside of the research team. Audiotapes will be identified by code number and stored in a secure, locked office. The audiotapes and transcripts will be stored separately from the master sheet identifying



names, pseudonyms, and code numbers. The master sheet will be shredded when data collection is complete and it is no longer required.

Although every effort will be taken to uphold your confidentiality, there are limits on the level of confidentiality that we as researchers can assure. Because you will take part in a small focus group, it is possible that you may be identifiable to other people on the basis of what you have said. The researchers will undertake to safeguard the confidentiality of the discussion in the focus group, but cannot guarantee that other members of the group will do so. Please respect the confidentiality of the other members of the group by not disclosing the content of this discussion outside the group, and be aware that others may not respect your confidentiality. After your interviews, and prior to the data being included in the final report, you will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview, and to add, alter, and delete information from the transcripts as you see fit. Also, it is important that you are aware that there are certain types of information that the researchers may be obliged to report to relevant authorities (e.g., child abuse, intent to do violence, etc.).

**Right to Withdraw:** Your participation is voluntary, and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. Not answering a question or withdrawing from the study will result in no penalty to you or anyone else. You may withdraw from the study for any reason without explanation until the data is pooled and analyzed without penalty of any sort; and the decision to withdraw will not affect any of your current or future activities. If you withdraw from the study, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed at your request. You will be advised of any new information that may have a bearing on your decision to participate. Prior to each phase, you will be asked if you still wish to participate.

**Questions:** If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to contact the researchers. You are also free to contact the researchers if you have questions at a later time. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office toll free at 1-888-966-2975 or [ethics.office@usask.ca](mailto:ethics.office@usask.ca).

You may contact the research team to find out the results of the study, request to be involved in the review of the themes that emerge from data analysis, or request a copy of the published manuscript.

**Consent to Participate:** I have read and understood the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

---

(Name of Participant)

---

(Date)

---

(Signature of Participant)

---

(Signature of Researcher)

## APPENDIX A: Transcript Release Form

Title of the Study: *Narratives of Body Image Among Breast Cancer Survivors as Endurance Athletes in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k Race.*

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Dr. Kent Kowalski to be used in the manner described in the consent form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

## APPENDIX B: Interview Guide 1

### 1. Issues Related to Consent

- a. Check to make sure participant has read and signed consent from prior to this interview
- b. Verbally inform the participants that they may choose to not answer any questions that they do not feel comfortable answering, and of their right to withdraw from the study until the data is pooled and analyzed without penalty.
- c. Remind the participant that the interview is being audio-recorded.
- d. Have the participant choose a pseudonym. (in layman's terms it is a fake name- also using this name on your blog)
- e. Tell them it is ok if there is silence, take time to answer questions.

### 2. Breast Cancer Survivorship

- a. How would you define breast cancer survivorship?
- b. What does the term breast cancer survivorship mean to you?
- c. How long have you been a breast cancer survivor?
- d. What surgeries and treatments have you had?
- e. What is it like to live as a breast cancer survivor?

### 3. General participation in Physical Activity and Sports

- a. How long have you been participating in physical activity or sports? (To what degree have you been engaged in sports? Did you play sports prior to breast cancer?)
- b. What types of physical activity or sports do you participate in?
- c. Why is participating in physical activity and sports important to you?
- d. Have many times have you participated in the CIBC Run for the Cure 5k Race?
- e. How do you feel about your current training level in preparation for this race?
- f. Explain the importance of this race as a breast cancer survivor?
- g. Explain the importance of CIBC Run for the Cure and what affect it may have on your body?
- h. What do you hope to get out of training in the CIBC Run for the Cure? (Do you want to place, make a certain time?)

### 4. General Body Image

- a. How would you describe the term body image to another individual? (When I say body image- what do you think about?)
- b. What words do you use to describe your body image?
- c. What are some emotions that you experience in terms of your body image?
- d. How has breast cancer, the surgical procedures, and treatment affected your body image as a women?
- e. Explain what your body image experience with breast cancer was like?
- f. Describe the challenges that you have experienced with your body image before and after breast cancer?
- g. Explain the importance of body image as a breast cancer survivor
- h. What are the goals that you have for your body?

- Goals for the Survivor Clinic and “Run for the Cure?”

## 5. Multidimensionality of Body Image

- Describe what you believe to be the ideal physique for women
  - Why is this ideal? (If respond with “fit” ask them to describe)
- How does your physique compare to this ideal for women?
- What are the most significant factors influencing your body image?
  - Describe the sources of these factors that influence your body image? (e.g., society, pressure from family/friends/self, significant other)
  - Explain behaviours that you engage in to control your body shape? (e.g., eating, exercise)
- In today’s society, how important do you think looking good is for women (women in general & BCS)?
- Explain the importance of clothing, makeup, hairstyle, and fashion in physical appearance?
  - How important is this to you? (Women & BCS)- has this changed before and after BC
  - How would do feel about your own physical appearance?
  - As a woman, and a breast cancer survivor training for the CIBC Run for the Cure how do you feel about your physical appearance?
- Describe the overall investment that you have in your physical appearance? (e.g., how much of your time and effort is placed on Physical appearance?)
- How would you describe to someone how your body looks?
- Describe the overall satisfaction/ dissatisfaction that you have with your body?
- How do you feel about your height, body weight, and body structure?
- What specific body parts are you satisfied with? Dissatisfied?
- If you could change specific body parts, what would you change? Why?
- Tell about what it is like when you see a woman with a ideal physique, how do you compare your own body with hers? Non ideal physique? (is the ideal physique a real person? Does BCS have an ideal physique?
  - What emotions do you experience in this situation?
  - Explain the experience of this situation when comparing to another breast cancer survivor?
  - Discuss concerns that you may have during the Survivor Clinic and the race?
- How has your ideal physique changed over time?
  - Describe different points in your life (past/present)
  - Is the ideal physique more/less important now? Physical Appearance?
  - What are some examples of changes in your own body image?
- As a woman, and breast cancer survivor  
How do you feel about your body as an athlete?
- As an athlete, what do you like about your body?
- How would you describe the ideal physique for endurance sport?
  - How would you compare yourself to that ideal physique?
- Why do you think physical appearance is important in endurance sports?

- Why is it important to you?
  - How does your body compare?
  - Explain the pressure that you feel surrounding societal standards and sport prior to the Survivor Clinic and the CIBC Run for the Cure
  - Describe emotions that you feel about your body prior to training for the CIBC Run for the Cure?
- q. Explain your plans for engaging in techniques to control your body shape for the training prior to the CIBC Run for the Cure?
- r. How does training for the CIBC Run for the Cure play a role in terms of your body image?
- s. How important is your physical appearance while training for the CIBC Run for the cure?
- t. Explain how your overall satisfaction/dissatisfaction with your body image will play a role in training for the CIBC Run for the Cure
- h. How do you feel about your current body image prior to training for CIBC Run for the Cure?
- What are your goals for your body prior to the Survivor Clinic and CIBC Run for the Cure?

**7. Additional Comments**

- a. Provide the participant with the opportunity to make additional comments.
- b. Do you have any else that you would like to add that might be useful for this study?
- c. Do you have any further questions or comments?

## APPENDIX C: Interview Guide 2

### Goals

1. Intersection of breast cancer survivorship, body image, and CIBC Run for the cure
  - Give them a piece of paper with 3 circles (body image, breast cancer survivorship, and CIBC Run for the Cure)
  - What is the relationship between breast cancer survivorship, body image, and CIBC Run for the Cure?
    - How do they come together?
    - Would this be the same for endurance sport or would it be different for CIBC Run for the Cure
    - What is it about these 3 elements that are important to you?
  - How does CIBC Run for the Cure play a role in the intersection between breast cancer survivorship, body image, and endurance sport?
    - What is the connection between this specific event and your body image experience as a breast cancer survivor?
2. Why endurance sport
  - Why did you choose to participate in endurance sport? Why drawn?
    - What is the purpose?
  - Explain how body image may play a role in the sports you select?
    - Why is this important?
  - Why do you think that the breast cancer community has centered events for breast cancer survivors around endurance sports?
    - Any particular reason?
3. Story
  - What story do you want told about your body image experience as a breast cancer survivor participating in endurance sport?
    - What do you want others to know about this intersection through your experiences?
    - If someone asked you to give a storyline with all 3 elements (breast cancer survivorship, body image, and endurance sport) to describe your experiences, what would you say?
    - What words are important to use in this story?
    - Key words?
4. Future Research

- What important questions need to be asked about body image in breast cancer survivors?
  - And endurance sport?
- What do I need to learn from these questions?
- What kind of sports do I need to focus on?
- What about these sports are important to breast cancer survivors and their body image experiences?

## **5. Additional Comments**

- d. Provide the participant with the opportunity to make additional comments.
- e. Do you have any else that you would to like to add that might be useful for this study?
- f. Do you have any further questions or comments?



## APPENDIX D: Blogging Instructions

1. Instructions on “How to create a blog”
  - a. Log on to the Internet and type <http://www.tumblr.com>
  - b. Click on signup in the top left hand corner of the website
  - c. Follow signup instructions by entering in your e-mail, a password, and username for your URL and future logins to your blog
  - d. The next step will ask for your age and also to agree to the terms of the website
  - e. A box with mixed words will appear and you will type what you see for verification
  - f. Now you officially have your own blog!!!
  - g. You can choose a picture of yourself, object, or any image for your blog, but please post either a **Theme** or a **Title** for your blog.
  - h. At the top of the website you can see that you have a horizontal bar with different applications to click on. The **Text** application is where you enter in your weekly blog entries. Also, there is a box for photos, links, audio, and video you can make use of these applications if you choose.
  - i. Remember to be creative when designing this blog do not be afraid to experience the different applications and settings that the blog offers. This blog is yours to be creative, expressive, and individualistic in anyway that you choose to do so.
  - j. Create a Pseudonym that you would like to use on in place of your name for the research process. Send the theme or title of your blog, the link, and your pseudonym to the researcher prior to July 23<sup>rd</sup>.
  - k. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to e-mail the researcher
2. Instructions for Blogging Entries
  - a. Blogging entries will start after completion of the first Survivor Training clinic on July 23<sup>rd</sup> and will proceed until completion of the CIBC Run for the Cure on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012.
  - b. Each entry will start with the day and the date to be entered
  - c. Each entry will discuss thoughts, feelings, quotes, images, and others (e.g. be creative in your ideas) expressing body image experiences in endurance sport.
  - d. Below is an outline with specific topics that you may include in your entries
3. “What not to enter into the blog entries”?
  - a. Please only use your pseudonym. Do not enter any personal information about yourself (e.g. first and last name, home address, phone numbers).

This is for confidentially reasons not to enter anything personal information.

4. “What will the blog entries entail”
  - a. Physical appearance and perception experiences related to the experience of training for the endurance event CIBC Run for the Cure
  - b. Physical functioning (e.g. energy levels, endurance, and strength) from participation in the survivor training clinic and during the CIBC Run for the Cure
  - c. Physical Competence and fitness experiences during the training and on race day
5. “How often should I blog”
  - a. Blogging entries are required after the completion of every weekly Survivor Clinic training sessions as well as completion of the CIBC Run for the Cure on race day.
  - b. You may access you blog at your convenience and accessibility to a computer and the internet
6. After completion of this study, deletion of your blog will be optional.
7. Instructions on “how to delete my blog”
  - a. Login to your tumblr account
  - b. Click on preferences in the upper-right-hand corner
  - c. Scroll down to the bottom
  - d. Click on delete your account (it is underlined)
  - e. Type and confirm your password
  - f. Click yes, I want to delete my account
  - g. You have successfully deleted your tumblr blog account
8. If you have any questions at all regarding these instructions please contact the researcher.

Katherine Maciulewicz  
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College of Kinesiology  
University of Saskatchewan  
Phone: 966-1123  
Email:  
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## APPENDIX E: Consent Form



### ***Body Image, Breast Cancer Survivorship, & Dragon Boat***

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled the **Camaraderie Narratives of the Body Image Experiences of Breast Cancer Survivors during a Season of Dragon Boating**. Please read this form carefully, and **feel free to email or call the researchers with any questions** you might have.

#### **Researchers:**

Katherine Maciulewicz  
Ph.D. Candidate  
College of Kinesiology  
University of Saskatchewan  
Phone: 966-1123  
Email:  
katie.maciulewicz@usask.ca

Dr. Kent Kowalski  
Professor  
College of Kinesiology  
University of Saskatchewan  
Phone: 966-1079  
Email: kent.kowalski@usask.ca

**Purpose and Procedure:** The purpose of this study is to explore the camaraderie narratives of the body image experiences of breast cancer survivors during a season of dragon boating.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Over the 6-month period (February to August), you will be asked to attend 3 focus group interviews, keep a journal, and participate in creative practice activities spread through out the time period of this study. The specific creative practice activities will be selected and determined by you.

Three semi-structured focus group interviews will be held with Katie Maciulewicz that will each last an estimated 45-90 minutes. The first focus group interview will be completed prior to pre-season training, the second interview will be conducted after completion of pre-season training and prior to the start of on-the-water training at the end of May, and the third interview will be completed after the completion of the dragon boat season. The first two focus group interviews will most likely be held at Bourassa's with the third interview at the Physical Activity Complex at the University of Saskatchewan, but the decision will be determine by you. Discussions in the interviews will include topics such as breast cancer survivorship, body image, camaraderie, physical activity and sports, and dragon boating. All focus groups interviews will be audiotaped,

and field notes may be taken. The audiotapes will be transcribed (written out) word for word in order for the research team to review what was said and develop themes.

**Potential Benefits:** Although no benefits of participating in this study can be guaranteed, there is the potential for participation to provide the opportunity for an increased understanding about camaraderie and body image experiences among breast cancer survivors in dragon boating. No research to date has been conducted on camaraderie narratives of body image experiences in breast cancer survivors in a season of dragon boating.

**Potential Risks:** There are no known or anticipated physical or psychological risks associated with participating in this study. You have the right to refuse to answer any question, at which point the discussion will be redirected. Not answering a question or withdrawing from the study will result in no penalty to you or anyone else. Although we do not expect any psychological risk, if we feel participation is placing you under undue stress (e.g., establishing mutual times for interview sessions) we will discontinue your involvement in the study, again resulting in no penalty. You are encouraged to contact the researchers at any time (before, during, or after the study) to ask any questions that you may have. In the event that you would like to further discuss your feelings regarding the issues discussed in the study, Saskatoon Mental Health Services can assist you:

Mental Health Services - services available to the public, no fee

Phone # 655-7950

- Adult Mental Health Services (for adults 19 years and older)

**Storage of Data:** All research material will be stored securely in the office of Dr. Kent Kowalski at the University of Saskatchewan. Only the researchers will have access to the data. The data will be stored for a minimum of five years after completion of the study. This is standard protocol for any data that may be published in an academic journal and/or presented at a professional conference.

**Confidentiality:** The data from the study will be used as part of the student researcher's Doctoral dissertation, as well as to produce a manuscript in hopes of publishing in a scholarly journal and/or being presented at a conference. However, *your identity* will be kept confidential. Although we might report direct quotations from the interviews, you will be asked to choose a pseudonym (made up name) and all identifying information (name, school, address, etc.) will be removed from our report. Only the research team will review the original audiotapes and transcripts. Names or other identifying information will not be discussed or made public outside of the research team. Audiotapes will be identified by code number and stored in a secure, locked office. The audiotapes and transcripts will be stored separately from the master sheet identifying names, pseudonyms, and code numbers. The master sheet will be shredded when data collection is complete and it is no longer required.

Although every effort will be taken to uphold your confidentiality, there are limits on the level of confidentiality that we as researchers can assure. Because you will take part in a small focus group, it is possible that you may be identifiable to other people on the basis of what you have said. The researchers will undertake to safeguard the

confidentiality of the discussion in the focus group, but cannot guarantee that other members of the group will do so. Please respect the confidentiality of the other members of the group by not disclosing the content of this discussion outside the group, and be aware that others may not respect your confidentiality. After your interviews, and prior to the data being included in the final report, you will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview, and to add, alter, and delete information from the transcripts as you see fit. Also, it is important that you are aware that there are certain types of information that the researchers may be obliged to report to relevant authorities (e.g., child abuse, intent to do violence, etc.).

**Right to Withdraw:** Your participation is voluntary, and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. Not answering a question or withdrawing from the study will result in no penalty to you or anyone else. You may withdraw from the study for any reason without explanation until the data is pooled and analyzed without penalty of any sort; and the decision to withdraw will not affect any of your current or future activities. If you withdraw from the study, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed at your request. You will be advised of any new information that may have a bearing on your decision to participate. Prior to each phase, you will be asked if you still wish to participate.

**Questions:** If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to contact the researchers. You are also free to contact the researchers if you have questions at a later time. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office toll free at 1-888-966-2975 or [ethics.office@usask.ca](mailto:ethics.office@usask.ca).

You may contact the research team to find out the results of the study, request to be involved in the review of the themes that emerge from data analysis, or request a copy of the published manuscript.

**Consent to Participate: I have read and understood the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.**

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(Name of Participant)

---

(Date)

---

(Signature of Participant)

---

(Signature of Researcher)

## APPENDIX F: Transcript Release Form

Title of the Study: *Camaraderie Narratives of Body Image Experiences in Breast Cancer Survivors in a Season of Dragon Boating.*

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Katherine Maciulewicz to be used in the manner described in the consent form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

## APPENDIX G: Focus Group Interview 1

### 1. Issues Related to Consent

- a. Verbally inform the participants that they may choose to not answer any questions that they do not feel comfortable answering, and of their right to withdraw from the study until the data is pooled and analyzed without penalty.
- b. Remind the participants that the focus group is being audio-recorded.
- c. Explain to the participants that there are limits on the level of confidentiality that I can assure. Because they are taking part in a small focus group, it is possible that they may be identifiable to each other on the basis of what they have said. I will ask that the participants please respect the confidentiality of the other members of the group by not disclosing the content of the discussion outside the group, and be aware that others may not respect their confidentiality.

### 2. Background Information

- a. What is the team's background in physical activity and sports?
- b. Why are you all a part of this dragon boat team?  
*Probe:* what brought you to dragon boating?
- c. Explain your current breast cancer experience  
*Probe:* where are you at in your breast cancer experience?

### 3. Camaraderie

- a. Why use the term camaraderie?
- b. What does the term camaraderie mean to you all as breast cancer survivors?  
*Probe:* what does it look like?
- c. Are there challenges with camaraderie?
- d. Who do you go to for camaraderie?
- e. How do you benefit from camaraderie?
- f. What are you hoping to get out of this dragon boating experience?

### 4. Creative Practices

- a. What activities would the team be willing to participate in as a component of this study? (e.g., collage, poster-making, artwork etc.)
- b. How many times would the team be willing to participate in activities for the remainder of this study?
- c. How often would the team be willing to participate in activities? (e.g., once a month, every two months etc.)

### 5. Additional Comments

- a. Provide the participants with the opportunity to make additional comments.

## APPENDIX H: Focus Group Interview 2

### 1. Issues Related to Consent

- a. Verbally inform the participants that they may choose to not answer any questions that they do not feel comfortable answering, and of their right to withdraw from the study until the data is pooled and analyzed without penalty.
- b. Remind the participants that the focus group is being audio-recorded.
- c. Explain to the participants that there are limits on the level of confidentiality that I can assure. Because they are taking part in a focus group, it is possible that they may be identifiable to each other on the basis of what they have said. I will ask that the participants please respect the confidentiality of the other members of the group by not disclosing the content of the discussion outside the group, and be aware that others may not respect their confidentiality.

### 2. Overview of Themes from One-on-one Interviews

- a. Recall that our first focus group interview focused on your breast cancer, camaraderie, and dragon boating experiences.
- b. Based on our preliminary analysis of the one-on-one interviews, we have created X number of themes. *Go over each theme one at a time and invite the participants to discuss each theme. A summary sheet will be provided to each participant that outlines each theme.*
  - probe:* Does this theme reflect the experiences you discussed in your interview?
  - probe:* Are there any additional themes you can think of that should be included based on your interview experience?

### 3. Additional Comments

- a. Provide the participants with the opportunity to make additional comments



## APPENDIX I: Creative Practice Guide

### 1. Instructions on Poster-making

- a. You will be provided with posters and craft supplies that will represent the camaraderie experiences of this breast cancer dragon boat team.
- b. This creative practice activity will last for approximately 60-90 minutes and you may take your time when making the posters.
- c. Be mindful of everyone participating as you will need to make decisions and choices together as a team to represent the camaraderie experiences.
- d. Feel free to use all craft supplies that is provided for you or that you may have brought to design the posters.
- e. If you have any questions during the activity, do not hesitate to ask me.
- f. Remember to be creative when designing posters, these posters are yours as a team to be creative and expressive in anyway that you choose to do so.
- g. Now you officially have posters that represent this breast cancer dragon boat team!!!

### 2. Instructions on “What will the posters entail”

- a. The camaraderie experiences related to the experiences that were discussed during the first focus group interview and the hat-making activity.
- b. Team goals that were previously discussed at the first focus group interview and hat-making activity and are a part of this team’s philosophy.
- c. Any themes, ideas, philosophies etc. that relate to the camaraderie experiences of this team.

### 3. Instructions on “What will the team do with the posters when it is completed”

- a. What the team decides to do with the posters is entirely up to the group. You may choose to use it for decoration in the team tent during the Saskatoon Dragon Boat Festival or simply just keep them for additional use.

## APPENDIX J: Transcript Release Form

Title of the Study: *Camaraderie Narratives of Body Image Experiences in Breast Cancer Survivors in a Season of Dragon Boating.*

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have reviewed the complete transcript of the focus group interviews in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in the focus group interview. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Katherine Maciulewicz to be used in the manner described in the consent form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

APPENDIX K: Transcript Release Form for Team Cheers

Title of the Study: *Camaraderie Narratives of Body Image Experiences in Breast Cancer Survivors in a Season of Dragon Boating.*

I, \_\_\_\_\_, as current team manager hereby authorize the release of team cheers to Katherine Maciulewicz to be used in her dissertation as discussed formally between her and I. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

## APPENDIX L: Photo Release Form

Title of the Study: *Camaraderie Narratives of Body Image Experiences in Breast Cancer Survivors during a Season of Dragon Boating.*

Researchers: Katherine Maciulewicz and Dr. Kent Kowalski  
University of Saskatchewan  
College of Kinesiology  
87 Campus Drive  
Saskatoon, SK  
S7N 5B3  
966- 1079

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have reviewed the data (i.e. photographs) from my participation in this study and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete data as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects my participation in the study. I hereby authorize the release of my name and photographs to Dr. Kent Kowalski to be used for educational purposes outlined in the consent form (i.e., publications, presentations) I have received a copy of this Data Release Form for my own records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher